

## **Pako Evening Service: 05//06/2016**

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 2:1-12; Acts 11:19-30; Sermon: "Defining a Christian"

Beloved people of the Lord Jesus Christ;

The Scriptures in Acts 11:26 state "The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch." Now for me that raises the question, "What must I do or believe to be called a Christian? How do I define what a Christian is?"

Now at its basic and simplest level I guess we could say that since the disciples were followers of Christ, they got that name "Christians."

So the question this evening is, "Why should you be called a Christian?" Now that's different then me asking you whether you are a Christian. In Acts 26, Paul gives a wonderful defence of the gospel and how the Lord used him to tell people about Jesus Christ.

And then King Agrippa states in verse 28 "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" (Acts 26:28). King Agrippa was right. A Christian is someone who accepts and believes the good news about Jesus Christ. So that is at least one reason why you should be called a Christian or perhaps why you shouldn't be.

According to the Apostle Peter, a Christian is someone who shares in, who participates in, "the sufferings of Christ" (1 Pet 4:12-13ff). "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed."

In other words, a Christian is someone who firmly and unshakably believes the good news about Jesus Christ and that they are prepared to suffer for his namesake. So that is a second reason why you should be called a Christian or perhaps why you shouldn't be.

Now the thing that concerns me is that many in today's world call themselves Christians but they don't really believe that Jesus is the Christ or that he is the Son of God, or even that he is the Saviour of mankind or of themselves.

Christianity has for some people become little more than a fashion label. And if you think what I am saying is too strong then tell me, "Why are so many people indifferent to Christianity when a crisis comes along in their lives? Why are so many indifferent about missions, or even coming to worship once on a Sunday? Is it too much to then ask whether they really have Jesus as Lord of their lives?"

There is a real danger that people wish to be classified as Christians for all sorts of reasons, but the most important reason is missing, namely that they trust, and believe unreservedly what the Scriptures teach about Jesus Christ and the price that was paid for their salvation.

It seems that some "Christians" are always asking, "What is the bare minimum of what it means to be a Christian? What can I get away with on the day of reckoning? How little do I have to respond to the good news?"

Some like to be called Christians in the church for that is where their parents are. Some like to be called Christians for then their children can be baptised and they can have a little 'god' talk at their wedding. Some like to be called Christians for then they can have a role to play in the leadership of the church.

And yet sometimes, the most important reason for being a Christian is missing, namely that they firmly believe that Jesus is their Saviour and Lord and that they would willingly suffer for Him so that His name and kingdom continues to go forth.

In some ways to be a Christian has now become "churchianity!" In our society we have people who have never darkened the inside of a church building, but still claim membership of the church.

Many say they are Christians but don't think it is important to live godly or be Christ-like. Congregation it worries me and I would suggest it should at least raise a concern in the hearts of many.

As a Pastor of the Lord's redeemed people, it concerns me when people claim to be Christians but don't live as people who know they have been saved from an eternity without God's grace in hell. For surely, if Jesus is their Saviour and

Lord and the key to their eternal salvation, you would think that everyone would want to live and speak and worship and do things in a way that would bring praise and glory to his name. Oh, not just Sundays, but every day!

The last thing you would expect is people making excuses for not doing so, yet that is exactly what happens. And sadder still, leaders of the Lord's church contribute to this false sense of security by calling these people Christians.

Perhaps unbelievers can be excused such ignorance and misuse of the name 'Christian' but Christian leaders of the bride of Christ cannot be excused. No Christian church should ever call anyone a Christian simply because they have been baptized or because they did their profession of faith.

No one should ever be called a Christians because their father or grandmother were active members or because their name is listed in a church's membership records.

Allow me to briefly define what a Christian is according to Scripture.

First and foremost, according to the Scripture you are called a Christian because you have true faith in Jesus Christ.

Acts 11:20-21; "Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord."

Faith in Jesus as the Christ lies at the heart of being a Christian. And without that faith or any evidence of that faith, no one can presume to be called a Christian. A Christian is someone who accepts Jesus as the Christ.

A Christian is someone who believes that what Jesus claims about Himself in the Bible is true. A Christian is someone who believes that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, that He is the Christ who took on our flesh when He was conceived by the Spirit and born of the virgin Mary.

A Christian is someone who wholeheartedly believes that Jesus died for them on the cross, that He was raised on the third day for their justification. They believe that He ascended into heaven and that He now sits at God's right hand.

The Apostle Peter says Christians, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house with Jesus being the "the chosen and precious cornerstone" (1 Pet 2:6). Christ and Christians are part of the same structure. So a Christian is someone who belongs to Jesus and behaves as Jesus did. A Christian doesn't stumble or fall over Jesus (1 Pet 2:8).

Rather, a Christian trusts in Jesus, the living Stone (1 Pet 2:4). A Christian is someone who knows they are a sinner and who come to Jesus for cleansing. They know they need the blood of Jesus to cleanse each spot of their soul.

A Christian is someone who is a member of Christ's body. In other words, he is part of living church united to Christ. He knows that, "Apart from Christ they can do nothing."

This means that everything we say and do and even think as Christians reflects on the glory of the Lord and the holiness of His name. Every 'sms' or email we send, every tweet we tweet, every Facebook picture or wall post, all of it either reflects negatively or positively on the Lord if you claim to be a Christian.

Do you understand? "If you are going to claim you are a Christian, then you best make sure that you behave and live like one!" Alexander the Great had to deal with soldiers who went AWOL. And he was ruthless. If a soldier went AWOL for no good reason, he was shot.

A young soldier, just 16 years old was brought to him for going AWOL. Alexander the Great asked this young boy who was trembling in fear, "What is your name?" And boy replied, "Alexander!" When Alexander heard this, he got up, walked over to the young soldier and grabbed him by his collar and yanked him towards him and said, "Then behave like an Alexander!"

We would hate to think that the world is laughing at our confession of being a Christian because what we say and profess doesn't fit with our lives. As members of Christ, as part of His body, there should be a perfect match between Christ and us. Yes, I know it is a tall order, but this is what it means to be a Christian!

Scripture teaches that you are called a Christian because by faith, we share in Christ's anointing as Prophet, Priest and King. We covered some of this last week so let me be brief.

At Jesus' baptism he was anointed with the Holy Spirit. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit, in fulfilment of Joel's prophecy and Moses' wish, was first poured out on all believers.

So a Christian is someone who by faith shares in Christ's anointing and is therefore someone indwelt with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we aren't merely pastors or farmers or computer technicians or nurses, or teachers, or businessmen or whatever. We are Christ-i-ans.

The day the Lord called us to be one of his own, the day we were born again by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit is the moment we have been given a task, a mission to perform. And from this task we may never retire until our promotion to glory.

As Christians, anointed with the Holy Spirit, we are to confess Jesus' Name. The Holy Spirit enables us to know and proclaim the truth that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who is our Saviour, Lord, all to the glory of God the Father!

The Holy Spirit enables me to stand before God and His people and publicly acknowledge my faith in Him, unashamedly. The Holy Spirit enables me to be witnesses to Christ in this world. More than that, since we know God's will, we have been anointed to speak out against evil and injustice.

As Christians, anointed with the Holy Spirit we are also to function in our priestly role, presenting ourselves as a living sacrifice of thanks. Unlike Christ's sacrifice which meant pain, suffering, and death and was therefore a sin offering; our sacrifice is a thank offering.

Peter says "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 2:5).

Oh there may be sacrifices involved. We may be ridiculed for the Lord's Name, or even ostracised for the Lord's name, perhaps even face death, but that isn't being the sin offering that Jesus was for us, but the doorway to eternity.

We will probably have to put our own desires and inclinations aside and as John Calvin said, "I offer my heart as an offering to God." As a living sacrifice of thanks we include our prayers, gifts of love and charity, songs of praise, our time, and our obedience.

This kind of godly living wins our neighbours over to Christ. As Peter puts it, "Live such good lives among the pagans that ... they may see your good deeds and glorify God" (1 Pet 2:12). All of us here must live as priests because we share in Christ's anointing.

Finally, the Christian is also anointed with the Holy Spirit to a kingly office. This means we involve ourselves in Christ's work of gathering the church and expanding the kingdom.

So we fight against the devil, the world, and our very own flesh of sin. Our weapon of offence is the Word of God. Our weapon of defence is believing prayer. This is a real war and we must fight. No secret alliances with the enemy are allowed.

Rather, being anointed for a kingly office means taking captive every thought and making it obedient to Christ (2 Cor 10:5). That means we willingly submit more and more to the rule of King Jesus. No stalemate is permitted. It is a fight to the death.

And by God's grace we can and do experience numerous victories in battle. Sadly, on account of the continued existence of sin within we also experience numerous setbacks. Yet, we are given the assurance of a final and ultimate triumph when we will "reign with Christ over all creation for all eternity."

So asking the question, "Why should you be called a Christian?" is a far deeper question than what first meets the eye. Names don't mean much if we don't put what we believe in to practice.

So next time, when someone asks, "Why should you be called a Christian?" may we be able to say unashamedly, I am a Christian because I am a member of Christ, have been anointed with the Holy Spirit to proclaim Him, and thank Him and reign with him forever. What a blessing that would be! Amen.