

“What Makes You a Christian?”

Acts 4:1-13

SKIT: What Makes You a Christian by David Acton

Scene 1: a bus stop. *(Make a sign and post it on a stand)*

Katja is waiting for the bus to arrive, impatiently looking up and looking at a watch.

KATJA: Come, bus, hurry up. I’m going to be late!

Eric enters the scene.

ERIC: Hi!

KATJA: Hi. *(looks quickly away)*

ERIC: *(Without warning, Eric suddenly starts barking like a dog.)* Woof! Woof!

KATJA: What are you doing?

ERIC: Isn’t it obvious? I’m a dog! *(“runs” around the room on all fours, sniffing and barking.)*

KATJA: No, you’re not!

ERIC: *(stops)* What do you mean? Of course I am. I bark like a dog. I run like a dog. I’m a dog.

KATJA: Just because you bark and run like a dog, that does not make you a dog!

ERIC: It doesn’t?

KATJA: No.

ERIC: Rats.

Katja is getting more impatient. Eric thinks for a moment, and then suddenly starts acting like a car.

ERIC: Vroooooommm! *(runs around the room squealing like a racecar.)*

KATJA: Now what are you doing?!

ERIC: I’m a Ferrari!

KATJA: No, you’re not!

ERIC: Yes, I am. I’m fast like a Ferrari. I sound like a Ferrari. I am a Ferrari. Want to go for ride?

KATJA: Just because you go fast and sound like a Ferrari, that does not make you a Ferrari!

ERIC: Really?

KATJA: No.

ERIC: Rats.

Katja is even more impatient, but now is distracted by what Eric will do next. Eric thinks for a moment, and then suddenly puts his hands in the air and freezes.

KATJA: What are you doing?

ERIC: Shhh!

KATJA: *(quieter)* What are you doing?

ERIC: I'm a tree.

KATJA: *(Normal voice)* What?

ERIC: I'm a tree. Look, the birds are about to land in my branches.

KATJA: *(completely exasperated)* You are not a tree!!

ERIC: Sure, I am. I'm tall like a tree. I'm quiet like a tree. I am a tree!

KATJA: Just because you are tall and quiet like a tree, that does not make you a tree!

ERIC: Really?

KATJA: Really..... *(Realizes the bus is now pulling away.)* Oh, no! That was my bus!

ERIC: I'm sorry. Hey, can I drive you somewhere? I have a real car...but it's not a Ferrari. Where are you going?

KATJA: Actually, I was on my way to church. You see, I'm a Christian. Hey, would you like to come with me?

ERIC: I don't know. I've never been to a church. I hear there are some strange people there.

KATJA: You'll like it, honestly. Come with me, please.

ERIC: Well, OK. It was my fault you missed your bus.

KATJA: Great. It's just across town.

(KATJA and Eric exit and quickly return to the stage.)

Scene 2: a church. *There are two chairs to represent a pew. Change the sign from BUS to CHURCH)*

ERIC: Wow, this place is huge! Look at all the empty seats up front! *(Starts to walk away.)*

KATJA: No! *(grabs Eric by the arm.)* No one ever sits up there. Here, we'll squeeze in the back row.

ERIC: OK. *(starts to sit down.)*

KATJA: *(quickly)* Stand up, stand up.

ERIC: Oh, OK.

KATJA: *(Shoves a hymnal in Eric's hands.)* Here, sing this!

ERIC: *(overloud)* LA LA LA LA LA!

KATJA: Shhh! Not so loud!

ERIC: *(quieter)* la la la la la.

KATJA: Sit down!

ERIC: What are they doing now?

KATJA: Praying! Fold your hands. *(Bows head.)* Amen.

ERIC: *(Overloud)* AMEN! Hey, who's that?

KATJA: That's just the pastor. He says the same thing every week. I usually take a nap. *(Leans back and yawns.)*

ERIC: *(actively listening.)* ... Wow. ... Really? God loves me? *(to KATJA)* Hey, you should listen, too.

KATJA: *(yawns)*

ERIC: *(still listening, leaning forward.)* Who, me? Come up there? Right now? OK. *(Starts to get up.)*

KATJA: *(Waking suddenly)* Hey! Where are you going?!

ERIC: Up to the prayer rail. The pastor just said if I want to know Jesus and become a Christian, I should go up there and pray.

KATJA: What? Are you crazy? He always says that. He doesn't really mean it.

ERIC: *(Dramatically, with a big pause.)* You know, you may go to church and sing like a Christian, but I don't think that makes you a Christian!
(pause) CURTAIN!

[1] You are not here by accident. Turn to the person sitting next to you and tell them, “I’m so glad you are here right now.” We need each other. God has blessed us to be here today and worship together. This moment is precious, and I don’t want to waste it. Will you pray with me?

Lord, listen to your children praying. Lord, send your Spirit in this place. Lord, listen to your children praying. Send us love, send us power, send us grace. Amen.

As illustrated in our skit a moment ago, there is a lot of confusion these days about what the word “Christian” really means. If you turn on your car radio, you might find several “Christian” radio stations, alternately labeled, “Religion”, “Easy Listening”, and “Miscellaneous.” If you go to a bookstore, and you might find “Christian” books in the “Self-help” section. And I’ve encountered several songs and books labeled “Christian” that raised my eyebrows.

It is a common misconception that if you can find it in a church somewhere, anywhere, then it must be Christian. That goes for people, as well as songs and books. Many people call themselves Christians and have no idea what that means. In fact, many people believe the only requirement is to attend church at some point in their life.

[2] Last year I celebrated the Shabbat with some friends in Cincinnati. And just because I ate the Shabbat does not mean that I’m now Jewish. If you go to Taco Bell, that does not make you a seven-layer burrito. And yet, many people will say, “I have been to church. That makes me a Christian.” It’s not logical.

I have two goals today. One: tell you how I became a Christian, and Two: tell you, without a doubt, how you can become one, too. By the end of this message, I want there to be no confusion, and I’m praying you will agree with me.

[3] First we should consider what the word “Christian” means. “Christ” is the Greek word for Messiah or Savior. It was the title that the disciples gave Jesus. “Christian” is the diminutive form of “Christ,” rather like the way a child would say “doggie” instead of “dog”. If you read Acts 11:26, you find that this term “little Christs” was first used in a town called Antioch, in the days of the early apostles. The name was originally an insult! It was as if people were saying, “Aw, isn’t that cute? They are pretending to be little Jesus’s.” These followers of

“The Way” acted so much like Jesus, people were confused. “Hey, isn’t that Jesus?” “No, that’s Steve.” “Really? I thought that was Jesus.”

[4] Names always have meanings. There is a story about a boy in ancient Greece who ran away from battle. He was caught and brought before Alexander the Great for trial and execution...the penalty for desertion. For some reason, Alexander first asked the boy what his name was. “Alexander, sir,” he shakily replied. Shocked and enraged, Alexander the Great spared the boy’s life, declaring, “Go back to the army and live up to your name!”

Likewise, if we are going to call ourselves Christians, we should know whose name we are carrying.

[5] The fact is, I do call myself a Christian. I grew up in a Christian home. I was baptized, confirmed, attended worship and youth group. I did all those things. I even went to summer camp, youth rallies, and “Christian concerts.” I pray before eating. As cool as all those things are, not one single one of those “made” me a Christian.

[6] The apostle Peter explains in our scripture what, or rather, who makes you a Christian. Peter and John were getting in trouble because they were Christians, although they hadn’t used that label just yet. They were part of the Way, which the ruling religious people considered a dangerous sect. When John and Peter healed a lame man, there was an uproar, and the authorities demanded an answer. Peter told them the truth. It was by the power of Jesus Christ that the man was healed. And then Peter declares, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

That’s a powerful statement. That’s an audacious statement. It got the disciples into a lot of trouble. However, they were firsthand witnesses to the truth of Jesus Christ. So they not only lived the truth, they proclaimed it to others. Peter and John knew what it meant to follow Christ, and through them, others believed.

You can believe that a church makes you a Christian, but you are wrong. You can even say a pastor made you a Christian – I’ve heard some pretty good sermons in my life, maybe even given a couple – but none of those leaders, as wonderful as they were, made me a Christian. Neither did the camps or retreats I

attended. There is only one name, one person who makes you a Christian, and that is Jesus Christ.

[7] After I graduated from college, I joined a church on the north side of Chicago. As I talked with the church elders, and they asked me, “Are you saved?” I replied, “Of course.” And I ran through all those events I told you about earlier. Then they asked, “Have you ever publically declared that Jesus is Lord of your life?” I had to think for a minute. I was sure that I had, at some point, but I couldn’t name a specific date. One of the elders then said something to me I’ve never forgotten. “Why don’t you tell us here, now, who Jesus is to you?” I said, “Jesus is my Lord and Savior, and he alone has rescued me from my sins.” They said, “Today is October 31, 1999. And you truly are a Christian.” I’ve never forgotten that moment, even though I believe I was a Christian before then. The difference was, I told somebody.

[8] I want to ask you a serious question, and don’t answer it too quickly. Think about it for a moment. Do you call yourself a Christian? If yes, why? If not, why not? Maybe there are some simple reasons. Maybe no one has ever told you how to become a Christian. Maybe no one has ever explained what is so great about salvation. Maybe you have heard things about the church that make you leery of becoming a Christian.

I want to tell you some good news. All it takes to become a Christian and have eternal life is to believe in Jesus. That’s it. If you surrender your life to Jesus, you are a Christian. It doesn’t matter if you grew up in this church, any church, or no church. It doesn’t matter if your parents were Christian, Jewish, or atheist. You may have been baptized already, or not. None of that makes you a Christian. Surrendering your life to Jesus is the only way.

[9] I want to share with you a simple explanation of what the gospel is. It’s called the 5G Gospel.¹ I’ll give you five words that all start with G: Good, Guilt, Grace, Gratitude, and God’s People.

[10] This first thing to know about becoming a Christian is the Good. God made you. God loves you. You were designed for a relationship with your Creator. The Bible tells us that the first humans enjoyed a close relationship with

¹ Pastor Laurie Powell, Youth Specialties. 2003?

God. They walked together. Talked. Laughed. Enjoyed each other. God made everything, and God called it good.

[11] The second G is Guilt. Although the world was good, brokenness entered it. We see the effects still today. There is hurt. There is sin. There is war, hunger, anger, and death. Each one of us has turned our backs on God and chose to live for ourselves. We all know it, if we are honest with ourselves. We are rebels, sinners, incapable of living up to God’s holy standard.

[12] The third G is Grace. Some people say Grace stands for God’s Riches At Christ’s Expense. Rather than letting us suffer, God did for us what we could not do. Through the Incarnation, Jesus, fully human and fully divine, entered into the earth he created, lived a perfect life, and died on a cross, taking on the punishment our sins deserved.

The mystery of grace is that through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the way is now open to be set right again; to be righteous before God. When we admit our sin to God, God forgives us and justifies us. Grace is a free gift, and available to all. Through the cross, we get what we did not deserve.

[13] Good, Guilt, Grace. Some gospel explanations stop right there. However, there are two more G’s. The fourth G is Gratitude. We cannot earn grace or salvation by good works. Only Christ can save us. Yet when we realize what Christ did for us, our response is to be grateful. Gratitude motivates us to worship, love, share, teach, and serve. Grace inspires gratitude, and through that gratitude, our faith is made known.

[14] There is one more G. God’s People. When we admit our sins and surrender to Jesus, God does not leave us orphaned. We are incorporated into God’s family, the church. To respond to grace, to grow in faith, to practice generosity, love, patience and all that, we need each other. God never intended you to keep your faith to yourself. It is meant to be shared. Just because you say yes to Jesus does not mean you will have an easy life or a perfect life. God’s gift to you is the church, to help you go deeper and understand your salvation.

Good. Guilt. Grace. Gratitude. God’s People. That is the gospel. Going to a church doesn’t make you a Christian. Responding to Jesus’ invitation and trusting in him alone for salvation is the only thing that does.

[15] One last story: D.L. Moody, a famous evangelist from Chicago, was riding the train one time when a drunk came up to him. The drunk said, “Mr. Moody, I’m one of your converts.” Moody replied, “Yes, I’m afraid that you are, because you are obviously not a convert of the Lord’s.”

You may or may not be convinced by what I have told you today. And the fact is, it’s not up to me. I’m not concerned at all about making converts. I’m interested in starting conversations. I fully trust and believe that Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, will call to himself those who are willing to trust him with their lives. Today and every day you are alive, you have a chance to respond to grace. You can do it during the sermon, the hymns, the offering, before or after the service. Jesus is calling you to become a Christian by responding to his grace.

[16] Romans 10:9 says, “If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” Trusting in Jesus, my friends, is the only way you can become a Christian. And I sincerely hope you will. Let’s pray.

Memory Verse: Ephesians 2:4-5

“Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”

Reflection Questions:

1. How would you define a “Christian”? Do you apply that term to yourself? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think some people consider themselves Christians? How do you know if they are?
3. What role does Jesus have in making someone a Christian?
4. What role does the church have in making someone a Christian?
5. How would you explain to someone else why and how they can become a Christian?
6. Whom do you pray for that they would become a Christian?