

INTRODUCTION:

Probably all of us here this morning know something about the importance of choosing an appropriate name.

- As parents, for example, we remember how much thought we put into naming our firstborn child.
- Generally speaking, we do not name our children Fido or Rover, for obvious reasons!
- In a similar way, we do not name our children Hitler or Jezebel, because those names are often associated with some very dishonorable people from the past.

As we can probably imagine, choosing a name for a company or a new product is also extremely important and sometimes very difficult.

- Certainly, these days, it is also very expensive.
- We now have an entire class of consultants who specialize in nothing other than thinking up names for new companies and new products.
- And with only 26 letters in the alphabet, the choices for new names are surprisingly limited.
- We are all familiar with the word invented by George Eastman—the word “**Kodak**,” a made up name that has nothing to do with the product.
- Other examples of made-up names are Nylon and Teflon and Kevlar.
- In the fairly recent past, we see some pretty good examples like PowerBook, and Java, and Pentium.

It is my understanding that the company we know as Rayovac has had at least a little bit of trouble switching over to the name Spectrum Brands.

- In a newspaper not too long ago, there was an article about a company (down in Florida, I believe) known as “**Spectrum Brands Corp.**”
- Apparently, Spectrum Brands Corp is basically a fake company and is in serious trouble with the SEC.
- And now the good company, Spectrum Brands, has one more challenge to overcome.

In the business world, I have also read (speaking of names) that there is a problem known by the Trademark Association as “**genericide.**”

- It is the problem that happens when one particular name brand becomes associated with all products in the same class—when even competing products are sometimes known by the brand name of another product.
- We are all aware that all facial tissues are sometimes known as Kleenex.
- All gelatin desserts are sometimes known as Jello. Any clear sticky tape is known as Scotch tape.
- Any dark, carbonated soft drink is known as a Coke.
- And any adhesive bandage is sometimes referred to as a Band-Aid.
- And so there is the danger that by becoming well-known, a product can lose its distinctiveness.

This morning, I would suggest that this is what has happened with the word “**Christian.**”

- At one point in history, this word had a very specific meaning, but over time—over hundreds of years of misuse—the term Christian is now used to refer to anyone who is vaguely religious.
- Over hundreds of years, the term Christian has now been “**genericized.**”
- This morning, though, I’d like for us to remember that names have always been extremely important to God.
- In the Old Testament Abram’s name was changed to Abraham. Jacob was changed to Israel.
- And in the New Testament, Saul was changed to Paul.

In a similar way, all of us who have been born into God's family have also been given a new name.

- The giving of this new name was prophesied all the way back in the Old Testament book of **Isaiah**.
- In **Isaiah 62:1-2**, the Lord said, "*For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not keep quiet, until her righteousness goes forth like brightness, and her salvation like a torch that is burning. The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; and you will be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord will designate.*"
- And then, in **Isaiah 56:5**, the Lord also said, "*To them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial, and a name better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off.*"

And so we find that this special name would be given only after the Gentiles had been welcomed within the Lord's walls, and it would be associated with kings being presented with the Lord's glory.

- With that in mind, there are a number of names that do not fit this description.
- The terms believer, disciple, saint, servant, and brother, certainly do describe us, they are certainly honorable terms, they are accurate, we can use them today, but all of them were also used in the Old Testament.
- And so there is a new and eternal name that was to be given by the Lord in the New Testament.

That name is Christian, and yet it is one of the most misunderstood words in the religious world.

- With that in mind, I'd like to ask that we use our time together this morning to look at each of the three times where the word Christian is found in the New Testament.
- I am always surprised that it is only found three times, but I'd like for us to look at each of these three verses and then let the context of each verse tell us something about the word itself.

I. First of all, we find in **Acts 11:26** that **A CHRISTIAN IS A TRUE DISCIPLE**.

If you will, grab a Bible and turn with me to **Acts 11**.

- As we look at **Acts 11**, we find that Peter was reporting back to the church in Jerusalem concerning the baptism of Cornelius, the first Gentile to obey the gospel.
- And right after Paul gave his report on the first non-Jew to be baptized, we pick up with **Acts 11:19-26**, and we find a record of the first primarily Gentile congregation.
- Please read with me... **Acts 11:19-26**...

- 19** *So then those who were scattered because of the persecution that occurred in connection with Stephen made their way to Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except to Jews alone.*
- 20** *But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who came to Antioch and began speaking to the Greeks also, preaching the Lord Jesus.*
- 21** *And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a large number who believed turned to the Lord.*
- 22** *The news about them reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas off to Antioch.*
- 23** *Then when he arrived and witnessed the grace of God, he rejoiced and began to encourage them all with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord;*
- 24** *for he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And considerable numbers were brought to the Lord.*
- 25** *And he left for Tarsus to look for Saul;*
- 26** *and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. And for an entire year they met with the church and taught considerable numbers; and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.*

Again, this is the first time that the term “*Christian*” is used in the Scriptures.

- It comes immediately after the first Gentile is baptized, and it is applied to the first primarily Gentile congregation of the Lord’s people.
- We remember what the Lord said in **Isaiah** that His people, once the Gentiles were included, would be given a new name—**Isaiah 62** said, “*The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory...*” before saying, “*and you will be called by a new name...*”
- And so we find that Luke, the author of **Acts**, simply says, “*And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch.*” Not Jerusalem, as we might expect, but Antioch.

He also makes a special point of saying that those who were called Christians were “*disciples*.”

- Literally, a disciple is simply a student. As Christians, we are disciples. We are learners. We are students of the Lord. We study the Lord through the word of God.
- As Jesus said in **John 8:31**, “*If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine.*”
- And so we find that only when we continue in the Lord’s word can we truly be disciples of the Lord.
- Only then can we truly be Christians.
- And so there is a difference between a true Christian and a Christian in word only.

I should also emphasize here that the word Christian was not a title that they invented on their own.

- But rather, Luke says that they were “*called Christians.*”
- Some people have said that Christian is a term of derision given by the enemies of the church.
- But think for a moment about the enemies of the church in **Acts 11**.
- The church’s enemies were the Jews!
- The term “Christ” refers to the Anointed One, the Messiah.
- There is no way that the Jews would refer to the disciples as the followers of the Anointed One.
- If the Jews had come up with the term Christian as a term of derision, they would have been admitting that Jesus really was the Messiah.
- The name Christian, therefore, was given by the Lord Himself, as was prophesied back in **Isaiah 62**.

And so, when we use the term Christian today, we are proclaiming that we are followers of the Lord.

- It is not a generic term, but it is very specific.
- In New Testament times, a Herodian was someone loyal to Herod.
- In more modern times, we would say that a Marxist is someone who follows the teachings of Carl Marx.
- And in the same way (there is no disrespect intended here), but a Lutheran is demonstrating commitment to the teachings of Martin Luther.
- A Calvinist is someone who follows the teachings of John Calvin.
- That kind of name-calling was specifically and very severely condemned by Paul in **1 Corinthians 1:10-13**.
- Paul said... “*Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe’s people, that there are quarrels among you. Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, “I am of Paul,” and “I of Apollos,” and “I of Cephas,” and “I of Christ.” Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”*

Paul is saying that to be called by someone’s name (in a spiritual sense) they have to be crucified for you, and you have to be baptized in their name.

- He was saying that it is wrong for people to separate themselves into various denominations.
- It is sinful for the religious world to be divided.

- The word denomination literally refers to dividing “**by name**”—the exact problem that Paul was condemning.
- And yet we look around us today, and there are literally dozens of denominations right here in Salem.
- In fact, in our yellow pages alone, I was able to find at least 30 different churches that are specifically named after different saints—including St. Paul, who would roll over in his grave if he knew what people have been doing.
- Because that is the exact situation that the Apostle Paul very specifically condemned in **1 Corinthians**... “*Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?*”

Thankfully, some religious leaders, even from various man-made denominations (even some of the founders of these denominations), have made some very true statements on this matter. For example...

- Albert Barnes (the Methodist commentator): *These divisions should be merged into the holy name Christian.*
- Martin Luther (the founder of the Lutheran Church): *I pray you leave my name alone. Do not call yourselves Lutherans, but Christians.... Cease, my dear friends, to cling to these party names and distinctions; away with all of them; and let us call ourselves only Christians, after Him from whom our doctrine comes.*
- John Wesley (founder of the Methodist Church): *I wish the name Methodist might never be mentioned again, but lost in eternal oblivion.*
- Charles Spurgeon (the very famous Baptist preacher): *I say of the Baptist name, let it perish, but let Christ's name last forever. I look forward with pleasure to the day when there will not be a Baptist living.*

Again, with all respect, we certainly agree with these statements, because only the term Christian was given by God, and we learn from **Acts 11:26** that a Christian is a true disciple of the Lord.

II. As we move on to the second time when the word Christian is used in the New Testament, we find from **Acts 26:28** that **A CHRISTIAN IS SOMEONE WHO HAS BEEN PERSUADED TO OBEY THE GOSPEL.**

In **Acts 26**, we find that Paul is called before King Agrippa.

- At this point, Paul had been kept a prisoner for over two years in Caesarea by the Roman Governor Felix.
- Felix was then replaced by another governor named Festus who refused to condemn Paul (even under intense pressure by the Jews).
- Not long after Festus becomes governor, he is welcomed through an official visit by King Agrippa.
- By that time, Paul had appealed to Caesar, but Festus wasn't exactly sure what to tell Caesar what Paul had done wrong.
- He couldn't send a prisoner to the Emperor with no charges, so since King Agrippa is visiting, Festus asks Agrippa to hear Paul make a defense. Let us read together... **Acts 26:1-3; 24-32.**

1 Agrippa said to Paul, "You are permitted to speak for yourself." Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense:

2 "In regard to all the things of which I am accused by the Jews, I consider myself fortunate, King Agrippa, that I am about to make my defense before you today;

3 especially because you are an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews; therefore I beg you to listen to me patiently.

And again, let us skip down to **verse 24** and read through the end of the chapter...

24 *While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, "Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad."*

25 *But Paul said, "I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth."*

26 *"For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner."*

27 *"King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do."*

28 *Agrippa replied to Paul, "In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian."*

29 *And Paul said, "I would wish to God, that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains."*

30 *The king stood up and the governor and Bernice, and those who were sitting with them,*

31 *and when they had gone aside, they began talking to one another, saying, "This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment."*

32 *And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar."*

As we look back at this chapter, I don't know if we appreciate who Agrippa really was.

- His full title was King Herod Agrippa II.
- There are many Herods in the New Testament, and this man was the last in a long line of horrible people.
- It was this man's great grandfather, Herod the Great, who killed the baby boys in Bethlehem in an attempt to kill Jesus as a baby.
- It was this man's uncle, Herod Antipas, who beheaded John the Baptist.
- It was this man's father, Herod Agrippa I, who killed the Apostle James and would have killed Peter as well if Peter hadn't been rescued by an angel.

And so we find that this man's grandfather, uncle, and father, were all Herods who had been opposing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

- All of these men, by the way, had either died or had been terribly disgraced shortly after all these events...so you would think that Agrippa would have some clue.
- Nevertheless, when Festus mentions a prisoner who was preaching about Jesus, Agrippa wanted to hear Paul for himself.

I find it interesting that Herod was "*an expert in all customs and questions among the Jews.*"

- He knew so much!
- We know from secular sources that this woman named Bernice (mentioned in **verse 30**) was actually Herod's sister.
- She had been married to her uncle, had left him, married a man named Polyon, ran away from him, and was now living in an incestuous and adulterous relationship with her brother Agrippa.

And so now we have Agrippa and Bernice listening to the gospel message.

- In **verse 27**, as Paul closes his message, he says, "*King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.*"
- And in response to that challenge, King Agrippa replies to Paul by saying, "*In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian.*" As we sometimes sing today, "*Almost Persuaded.*"

In other words, there is a lot more to being a Christian than simply believing the Bible to be true.

- Herod was a man who was an expert in the Jewish faith. He believed the prophets.
- He was right there on the edge, but even Herod knew that he was not ready to put his faith in action.
- Maybe he wasn't ready to end that relationship with his sister.

- Maybe he wasn't quite ready to make a public confession of his belief in Jesus as God's Son.
- Maybe he wasn't ready to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of his sins.
- Whatever the case might have been, we find that being a Christian is something that we can be persuaded to become.
- It is more than a casual belief, but it is something that takes a commitment—apparently, a commitment that Agrippa was not willing to make.

I think we can summarize by saying that we cannot be Christians unless we are persuaded to the point of actually doing whatever the Lord tells us to do.

- We should each ask ourselves a couple questions... “**Am I a Christian?**”
- And... “**Have I done everything that the Lord has commanded for me to become one?**”
- We cannot be Christians unless we have been persuaded to obey.

III. There is a third time the word “*Christian*” is used in the New Testament, and we find in **1 Peter 4:16** that **A CHRISTIAN IS SOMEONE WHO GLORIFIES GOD IN THAT NAME.**

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;

13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

15 Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler;

16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name.

The surrounding verses tell us that those who read this for the first time were being persecuted for their faith.

- But Peter's main point was that no matter what happens, we as Christians are to glorify God in this awesome name that we have been given.
- We remember what Paul said in **Colossians 3:17**, “*Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.*”
- Everything we do should cause us to live up to the name that we wear.

Several years ago, there was an article in the *Wall Street Journal* concerning the phenomenon of the coincidental match-up between the names of some people and their careers.

- These are people who did not choose their career based on their name:
- The author wrote about John M. Hamburger, who is the president of a restaurant consulting firm in Minnesota.
- Chris Roach, of Sterling, Virginia, is an inspector for Terminix, the pest control company.
- His mother and his brother also work at the same franchise.
- There is C. Martin Lawyer III, who is an attorney in Tampa, Florida.
- There is R. Bruce Money, now a business professor at the University of South Carolina. Dr. Money is a former banker. He never uses his first name, Richard, lest he be called Dr. Rich Money.
- Larry Bone is an orthopedic surgeon.
- Shawn Buckless is a university fundraiser.
- The list goes on and on, but the lesson is: When we wear the name Christian, our behavior is not to be a coincidence, but we are to glorify God in the name that we have been given.

Very early in the Second Century, someone sent a report to the Emperor Hadrian concerning those who called themselves Christians.

- Apparently, this was written sometime between 117-138 AD, not very long after the death of the Apostle John:

They walk in all humility and kindness, and falsehood is not found among them. They love one another. They rescue the orphan from violence. They do not refuse to help widows. He who has, gives, ungrudgingly, to him who lacks. If they see a stranger, they take him home and entertain him as a brother. When one of their poor passes from the world, any one of them who sees it provides for his burial according to his ability. And, if they hear about one of their number being in prison or being oppressed for the name of the Messiah, all of them provide for his needs. Thus they labor to become righteous as those who expect to see their Messiah, and to receive from him the glorious fulfillment of the promise made to them. Truly, this is a New People and there is something divine in them.

SUMMARY:

This morning, we have seen that...

- A Christian is a true disciple of Jesus Christ—not wearing the name of a man-made denomination, but simply wearing the name of Christ.
- A Christian is someone who has been persuaded to obey the Lord completely—being a Christian goes far beyond just believing in the Lord, but it involves being persuaded to follow through with obedience.
- And finally, a Christian is someone who glorifies God with that name by imitating the life of Christ and living up to that name.

CONCLUSION & INVITATION:

As I prepared for this morning's lesson, I found an article about the research of Alex Shoumatoff and a book he wrote entitled, *The Mountain of Names*.

- He reports that demographers in the US have calculated that even as far back as 1960 there was only a 20% chance that a man would have descendants with his last name only thirteen generations later.
- He went on to say that American family names are now dying faster than ever because couples are now having even fewer children.

I don't know—in thirteen generations there may not be any more Morkassel's—With two daughters, I realize that I'm not helping with this issue.

- But there is one family name that will continue forever.
- It was prophesied in **Isaiah 62**—an everlasting name...given by the Lord.

Are you wearing this family name?

- The Bible tells us that we are born into God's family when we believe in Jesus, when we repent of our sins, and when we allow ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism, for the forgiveness of our sins.
- As Peter said in **Acts 4:12**, "...*there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.*"

If you are ready to glorify God in the greatest name ever given, we hope you will let us know about your decision right now, as we stand and sing...