

Are You A Christian?

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Sam Jones, the evangelist, used to say that being a Christian meant quitting your meanness. That would knock a lot of church members off their seats because there are many in the churches who act like angels on Sunday and the devil throughout the week. They are just mean through and through, yet they call themselves Christians. But I think old Sam Jones was right: being a Christian is quitting your meanness. It's being a doer of the word and not a hearer only. A Christian is someone who has experienced change. Jesus told Nicodemus, "You must be born again." There has to be a new birth, friends.

Well, a contemporary of Sam Jones was the evangelist D. L. Moody and after Moody got converted, he promised God that he would not let a day go by without speaking to at least one person a day about their soul. Moody would accost just about anybody on the streets of Chicago, grab them by their coat-sleeve and ask, "Are you a Christian?" He did that so frequently that he became known in Chicago as "Crazy Moody." Well, Moody was crazy alright, he was crazy for Christ and thirsty for souls.

But that is what D. L. Moody would ask a person, "Are you a Christian?" Moody often commented that since he'd been a Christian a day had not passed but he had spoken to someone about their soul. I ran the math on that, friends, based on the time Moody was converted as a teenager and the time he died and went to glory. It's a period of about 42 years and that comes to over 15,000 one-on-one personal witnesses throughout his life. Now, he more than likely spoke to more than just one person a day about their soul so that number is probably considerably higher. But think of that: think if you just spoke to one person a day about Jesus how many thousands of witnessing opportunities that could present themselves to you.

Well, there was a man who knew Moody and who had the opportunity to test Moody on the fact if he actually witnessed to at least one person a day. It was the fall of 1892 and an associate of Moody by the name of Peter Billhorn decided to test the evangelist during meetings in Buffalo, New York. Here are Billhorn's comments,

"One stormy Monday morning, after reading and prayer, I ventured to ask him wherein his power lay. He said, 'Billhorn, I will tell you this much: I made a promise to God and the rule of my life that I would speak to at least one man every day about his soul's salvation.' I said: 'But, Mr.

Moody, the opportunity does not always present itself! He quickly replied: 'It will if you keep in touch with God and keep your eyes open for the opportunity!' I was anxious to see just how he approached men on the subject of salvation, so watching closely from morning till evening, I was sure that no one had called that rainy day to see him. I knew that the elevator man was a Christian, also the clerk and the colored man who waited on the table.

“The storm which had been gathering, grew more severe and at about time to get ready for the meeting, it seemed to be at its worst. I said: 'I guess there won't be many out tonight in this storm.' With a sort of a grunt, Moody said: 'There will be a houseful if you believe there will be.'”

“Later, Billhorn held the umbrella over Moody and urged him to get into the waiting carriage first, but no, he pushed me in and then stepped in. Water was running down the street like a river, and almost reached the stepping board. Every few minutes Moody would open the door and stick his head out in the storm. Soon he called to the driver to stop, stepped out of the carriage into the rain and stood there a moment. Soon a man came along, pushing his way against the storm with an umbrella. Mr. Moody stopped him and said: 'Where are you going?' 'I'm going to the Opera House to hear Moody preach,' the man answered. 'So am I. Step in and ride.' He literally lifted the man in. Hardly had the man seated himself when Mr. Moody said to him: 'Are you a Christian?' 'No, I am not.' 'Would you like to be?' The man, shaking the water from his hat and collar said: 'You don't think I'd be coming out in this storm to hear Moody preach if I wasn't thinking that way, would you?' Then Moody said to me: 'Billhorn, you pray for this man!'

“Billhorn and Moody both prayed and Moody led the man to Christ. Billhorn took the man to the front row of the auditorium where Moody was about to be preaching still unaware it was Moody who'd been talking to him. Soon the bulky evangelist appeared, preached and concluded with an invitation. With many others, the new convert arose. Pointing at him, Moody asked, 'Are you a Christian?' The man called out, 'I was saved in a carriage tonight coming here. A man prayed for me. I guess that was you, Mister.'”

Listen friends, Moody had a dogged determination for the souls of men and he had the tenacity of a bulldog. He went after them and he would ask, “Are you a Christian?”

Now, let me back up a little and explain to you the time period in which Moody lived. Moody was the product of the second Great Awakening and America back then was not the America of today. The church back then was not the church of today. The church in America had been revitalized by revival and was operating with New Testament vitality. If you said you were a Christian back then, it meant something, it meant you had forsaken

all to follow Christ and you lived for holiness and the salvation of souls. There was a vast distinction between a Christian in those days and an unconverted person. An unsaved person would never admit to being a Christian unless he indeed was one and there was a vast difference between Christians in America back in the 1800s and our worldly brand of Christians in our day.

Allow me to put it into perspective: most Christians in the West today are consumed with this world and its entertainments. As long as you attend church once a week, give a little of your money to it, it proves you're doing right as a Christian but that's about as far as it gets. But listen, friends, in the 1800s especially during the second Great Awakening, things were drastically different between Christians of that time period and now. Here's a good example: when I was conducting research at Hartford Seminary for my biography on Azahel Nettleton, I was allowed to go downstairs into the basement of that seminary and tucked away in that basement is the rich history of Christianity in New England in the 19th century for in that basement I was startled by what I found when I turned the lights on. There on the walls hang plaque after plaque with names of the students, graduates from the seminary. It was a day of missionary enterprise in America and God was afoot in the land in revival. There on that wall were the names of students who'd planted their lives in foreign soil for the sake of the gospel.

I read them one by one. For example, it would read: "John Smith died in New Guinea as a missionary of the gospel," and it gave the date. "Jane Smith died as a martyr in China," and it gave the date. "John Brown died in the Hawaiian Islands preaching the gospel," and it gave the date. "Judy Brown died as a martyr in India for the sake of the gospel," and it gave the date. On and on were these names of students who'd given their lives for the cause of Christ because the Great Commission consumed them. They had left America, left their homes, left their friends and family and planted their lives in foreign soil for the sake of souls because eternity consumed them, Christ consumed them. Today the internet consumes them. Sports and entertainment consume them. The secular business world consumes them.

I was speaking with a Christian college student about her future and she said she felt God had called her to be a missionary but when she looked into it, she realized she could not support herself in that endeavor so she was majoring in business to graduate and get a secular job to better take care of herself. In Moody's day, there was a vital brand of Christianity but today it's mainly apathy and self-preservation. So, when Moody would ask the question, "Are you a Christian?" it meant something in the 19th century but today if you were to go out from here and stop people on the street and ask, "Are you a Christian?" most everybody would say, "Yes," even though they are unregenerated individuals because the church of our day makes more false converts than real ones.

But I think it's a good approach even for our time, friends. It would be a good conversation starter to go up to someone and ask them, "Are you a Christian?" and then have them explain why they believe themselves to be a Christian. They may say something like, "I'm a member of such-and-such Baptist church. I've been a Christian since I was a little child. I am a Sunday School teacher," or "I'm a deacon," or "I sing in

the choir.” We need to show them that being a Christian is not defined by a record of service. Salvation is not something you did 20 years ago and put in a tin can. A true Christian has experienced repentance towards God and faith in Jesus Christ. It's a daily repentance, a daily faith, a daily witness. It's being a doer of the word and being born from above in a vital union with a living Lord.

But I fear too many today have filled our churches because they believe the fact of the death of Christ rather than believing on the Christ who died. They are merely decisionists. They decided to be a Christian based on a text or a passage but they've never been awakened to their lost condition, never been convicted of sin by the Holy Spirit and never have been savingly converted through the act of regeneration upon the heart. They are Christians because they grew up in a so-called Christian home or they joined the church for a number of other reasons: perhaps to make contacts for their business or maybe they joined a church because they were lonely or they joined a church because they like to join things. But they lived their lives for this world and not eternity. They serve their bellies and gratify their lusts and they sit and rule on the throne of their lives but that's not a Christian, friend, that's an unconverted church member.

You could gently show them what a true Christian is, that a true convert is someone who has experienced change like Jesus says, “That person's been washed in the blood and born from above.” Jesus declared, “You must be born again.” One who is a Christian has experienced a new birth through the supernatural act of regeneration upon the heart. God says, “I will take the stony heart and make it a heart of flesh.” Only God can perform this work. People don't make themselves Christians. You could tenderly explain to them that a true Christian lives for the glory of God and pursues a life of holiness, that eternity is stamped on their eyelids, that they pray for the lost on a regular basis and they witness for Christ on a regular basis, that they are grieved over the condition of the church and the state of the country and they pray for revival to come to break forth on the land. They spend the better part of their leisure time on their knees and in their Bibles because they know they must redeem the time because the days are evil. Eternity consumes them. They actively go out into the highways and hedges and compel the lost to come in to the marriage supper of the Lamb. Is that not what a true Christian is, friends? Am I making this up? That's what my Bible says a Christian is.

Our trouble today is we compare ourselves to our fellow contemporary Christians but we need to back up a few centuries and re-examine what true Christianity really looks like. Just listen to the conversation of the average church member today and you will hear about the pursuit of this world and its entertainments whereas D. L. Moody would insist, “It is souls I want! It is souls I want!” What do we want? A more expensive car? A bigger home? A new wardrobe? Moody wanted souls.

Listen friends, what we pursue in this life reveals the character of our hearts. If we live for the world, chances are we have missed out on God. Just because we responded to an evangelist gospel invitation and walked an aisle and repeated a prayer doesn't necessarily mean we are truly born again. Have we experienced change? A Christian is someone who has experienced change. They are a new creature. When a person comes to Christ

savingly, self is dethroned and another is enthroned there, the Lord Jesus Christ. What are you living for? Yourself or others? This world or eternity? Are you living for the glory of God and the salvation of souls? Is our main aim in life to go and make disciples? To reach the perishing with the gospel of the Son of God? Are we going after poor sinners and telling them about a Jesus who came down here so we can go up there? Are we being honest with folks and warning them of their danger or dying in their sins and being cast into an everlasting place of misery called hell? Are we telling them about their duty of repentance?

I want to challenge each of us here to follow Moody's example and ask someone today, "Are you a Christian?" and confront them with eternity and the God of that eternity. Speak to their souls about the pearl of great price. Oh friends, if we only had an ounce of Moody in our day! Let me finish this message with a story from the life of D. L. Moody and perhaps it will challenge us to be more consistent soul winners. Here now is that story of the one who refused to go to bed at night unless he spoke to a man about his soul. Listen to it carefully, friends:

"Moody had a long day and got to bed close to midnight and was about to turn off the gas lamp by his bedside when he realized he'd not witnessed to a soul that day. It was pouring down rain outside and cold but determined to find a soul and keep his promise to God, Moody rose from his bed, threw on his overcoat and hat and ventured out to the dark rainy night.

"Mr. Moody saw a man leaning against a lamp-post. Stepping up to him and placing his hands on his shoulders he said, 'Are you a Christian?' The man flew into a rage, doubled up his fists and it seemed for a moment if Moody might be pitched into the gutter. 'I'm very sorry if I have offended you,' said Mr. Moody. 'Mind your own business!' roared the man. 'That is my business,' Moody replied and he turned and went home back to bed.

"About three months later on a bitter cold morning at daybreak, someone knocked at D. L. Moody's door. 'Who's there?' he asked. A strange voice answered, 'I want to become a Christian.' Moody opened the door and to his astonishment, there was the man who had cursed him for talking to him about his soul as he leaned against the lamp-post. 'I'm very sorry,' said the man, 'I haven't had any peace since that night. Your words haunted and troubled me. I couldn't sleep last night and I thought I would come and get you to pray for me.'

Well, that man accepted Christ and the moment he had done so, he asked, "What can I do for Jesus?" Moody put him to work in the Sunday School until the Civil War broke out when he enlisted. He was one of the first to be shot down dying on the battlefield.

Listen friends, eternity hangs in the balance while we live unto ourselves. Won't you go out this week and find a poor sinner and speak to them about their soul? If not, let me ask you a question: Are you a Christian?