

What is your definition of a Christian?

February 4, 2018 Sermon by Pastor Diana J. Perkins

Our daughter Sharon lived on the Princeton University campus a few years ago. She invited Leroy and me to visit her on a weekend so we had the privilege of getting a tour of the campus and meeting some of the professors who taught there as well. When Sunday morning came around, Sharon knowing that we would want to attend church, offered to attend the morning service with us that was scheduled that morning. I was thrilled thinking that I would hear a profound sermon from an intellect and I expected it to be passages that would give me new insight and knowledge in the word of God.

I have never forgotten the sermon and I can still picture the young woman who blessed us with the word of God that morning. Her message was taken from the book of James, beginning with the 22 verse of chapter 1. It reads like this: "Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like a man beholding his natural face in a mirror; for he beholdeth himself and goeth his way, and immediately forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whosoever looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth in it, he being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." The speaker then told us that all of her family have college degrees and are professional educators at some of the most prestigious universities and colleges in America. Ten or more years ago a child was born into the family with severe learning disabilities. At first it was overwhelming and heartbreaking for everyone and the family had a very difficult time facing the truth that this child would probably never walk or talk and would need lifelong care. She went on to say how that everyone banded together and gave this little girl the best care that was possible for her and she was surrounded by loving, caring family members. There were no miracles ahead for them, but she became an intricate member of their family and she was dearly loved. After a decade or more, one day at a family reunion, the child was sitting in her wheel chair when suddenly she got excited when someone put a puppy in her arms. She opened her mouth and began speaking to the puppy. The lady's voice was filled with emotion as she described the joy that the family felt after hearing this child speak for the very first time in her life. The lady described what it was like to care for this child with the understanding that there would never be moments of pleasure watching this little girl grow in understanding or maturity. Love given without expectation of reciprocation, yet God in his love and mercy saw fit to surprise and bless this family at a reunion where everyone witnessed the wonderful sound of that child's voice speaking to a puppy. Tears filled my eyes as I studied the lady's face where gratitude shone through her eyes and the smile on her face was wonderful to witness. This wonderful gift that God had entrusted this family with was truly a blessing to them. There was no shame, no bitterness towards God, nothing but just sheer joy sharing the story of a child saying her first words in the midst of a very large, caring family where everyone was present to hear them. I left that service with a

feeling of humility and wonderment. It dawned on me that God doesn't need the wisdom of this world to speak to hearts of men; he uses the foolishness of preaching, he didn't call the highly educated religious priests, scribes, and Pharisees to be his disciples; he chose those who the world rejected and despised that He might elevate them to greatness.

In 1 Corinthians 1:18 it says that the preaching of the cross is foolishness to those that are lost. God said that He would destroy the wisdom of the wise and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. It then asks questions about the whereabouts of the wise in this age. "Hasn't God made the wisdom of this world foolish? It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save those that believe." Paul continues this exhortation by stating that the cross of Christ was a stumbling block to the Jews; unto the Gentiles it was foolishness. The Jews sought for signs and the Greeks sought after wisdom but for those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is both the power of God and the wisdom of God. The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than man. If you continue reading, you will find that God didn't call many men who were esteemed to be wise in this world, nor did he call many who were considered noble or mighty by this world's standards. But God has chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise; and God has chosen the weak things of this world to confound the things that are mighty.

What the world considers worthless, useless, and nothing at all, God uses to destroy what the world considers important. God did all this to keep anyone from bragging about himself. We are God's children. He sent Christ Jesus to save us and to make us wise, acceptable, and holy. So if you want to boast, do what the Scriptures say and boast about the Lord.

Recently I watched a video about the football career of a young man named Tim Tebow. He was born in the Philippines as his parents were missionaries there. He was the youngest of five children and was raised in a godly environment. His dad was his hero for he taught him the values, character, and importance of living a Christian life. He spoke that his father didn't preach to him; he lived it in front of him and taught Tim to be passionate about everything that he attempted in life. The important thing to him is to honor God, enjoy whatever he attempts to do and to put his best effort into everything that he attempts. His dad taught him how to show proper respect for women, how to be a good husband and how to be a good team player. The family resided in Florida and the school system in that state allowed home schoolers to participate in the sports of the public schools and Tim played quarterback for that high school. His skills brought victories to the school and he was sought by many colleges because of his successes.

He chose the University of Florida and his coach was Urban Meyers. At the time, the players were putting names under their eyes such as their mom, friend, or whatever, and Tim decided that he would put the Bible verse of Phil. 4:13 under his eyes. The verse says "I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me." That night they won the national

championship game and Time found out later that over 90 million people googled Phil. 4:13 the night of their victory. Within days, the verse was being sold on items for people to keep for souvenirs at the games. In 2009, Tim felt that he wanted to change the verse under his eyes and he chose John 3:16. He went to the coach and told him that he was going to change the verse to John 3:16 and the coach told him that he couldn't change the verse as it was what got them to the championship games. However, after he explained that he really wanted to do this, the coach agreed. They played against Tennessee and won that game. In January 8, 2012, 3 years later, they played a play-off game against the Pittsburgh Steelers. They won that game and a couple days later, Tim was celebrating the victory with his coach and his parents at a local restaurant when the coach got a phone call. After he finished the call, he asked Tim if he understood what happened that night of the game. Tim said that he knew they won and that was all he needed to know. The coach said that the phone call was from Patrick the PR for the team. He told him that it had been exactly 3 years since Tim had started wearing the John 3:16 under his eyes and then he gave him the scores. He threw 316 yards that night; his completion rush score was 31.6; his average rating was 31.6; and his possession score was 31.06. The most amazing thing happened also for 91 million people googled John 3:16.

They were now on their way to play against the Patriots!

What a wonderful testimony of the power of God to bless a person's life and to cause others to be curious about the hope that set Tim apart from others for the glory of God.

God is still in the miracle working business. He has not changed since the days that He walked on this earth and worked miracles using insignificant people to show his power through. Look at John 6:1-14. It was almost time for the Jewish Passover and Jesus went up into a mountain and sat down. A large crowd came around Him and Jesus asked Philip where they would get enough food to feed all of them. He was testing Philip as He already knew what He was going to do. Philip answered that it would take almost a year's wages just to buy enough bread to give the crowd a little bit to eat. Andrew, Peter's brother spoke up and said that there was a lad in the crowd who had five loaves and two fish but he didn't think that it would do them any good among so many. Jesus told the disciples to sit everyone down on the grass and approximately 5000 men plus women and children sat on the ground. Jesus took the bread and fish, blessed it, handed it to the disciples to distribute and everyone was fed and satisfied. After the people had eaten all they wanted, Jesus told the disciples pick up the surplus. They filled 12 large baskets with the remnants of the five barley loaves. When the people witnessed this amazing miracle, they said, "This must be the Prophet who is to come unto the people." Jesus realized that they would try to force Him to be their king so he went up on a mountain where He could be alone.

Jesus elevates those who are willing to step out in faith and present themselves in service to the Lord. That lad didn't know that Jesus was going to use him to provide food for a multitude that day that he packed a lunch before going to hear Jesus preach.

The woman that met Jesus at the well was downtrodden and a social outcast, but was elevated by Jesus for he deliberately went through Samaria to meet with her. John 4:1-39. When Jesus revealed to her all that she had ever done and who He is, the one that she was longing for, she went into the city carrying the testimony of who He is and inviting others to come "see a man who told me everything that I ever did. Is not this the Christ?" Inverse 39 it reveals that many Samaritans believed on Jesus first because of the woman's testimony and then secondly because they came to see and hear Jesus for themselves. Jesus was sitting at the house of Simon, who had leprosy at one time, when a woman came in and poured expensive perfume on Jesus' head. This made some of the guests angry and they complained that she was wasting perfume that could have been sold for more than 300 silver coins and the money could have been given to the poor. Jesus told them to leave her alone for the poor they could help anytime, but He would not be with them much longer. She had done all she could for Him in preparation for his burial. He told them that for sure wherever the gospel would be preached, the deed that she had done would be attributed to her and her story would be circulated to future generations. (Mark 14:1-9) Jesus desired to elevate a rich man, but because he was so attached to his wealth, he refused Jesus' offer. (See Mark 10:17) The rich man ran up to Jesus and asked what good thing he could do to have eternal life. Jesus listed some of the 10 Commandments and the man claimed that he had obeyed all of them since he was a young person. Jesus loved him and told him one thing he was lacking. He needed to sell everything he had and give it the money to the poor and he would have riches in heaven. Then he was to come and follow Jesus. The man walked away sadly for he had great riches. The man didn't consider that the treasures that he was hoarding up would not do him any good when it came time to die. All material things will be left behind and the only treasures that we can take with us are the souls that we have won to Jesus Christ. The good works that we have done to glorify God will be recognized and we will be rewarded for those also.

My prayer is that everyone who reads this or hears the words to this sermon will consider their position in God's eyes. Don't just listen to the sermon and go away living the same as before you heard the word. Apply it to your life and allow the Holy Spirit to teach you how to be grateful, thankful and a blessing to God in your everyday life. Learn to appreciate Jesus regardless of the trials, tribulations, or hardships that come your way. Proverbs 3:5 says to "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge Him and He will direct your path."