

Becoming a Christian

by John Vissers

Becoming a Christian means receiving Christ, believing in his name, and becoming a child of God, which brings new life, freedom, and forgiveness.

Duration: 31:35

Scripture: John 1:1

Topics: "Christian"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher begins by describing the daring feat of the tightrope walker, Blondin, who successfully crossed Niagara Falls on a tightrope. The preacher then draws a parallel between Blondin's trust in the tightrope and our need to trust in Jesus. He emphasizes that Jesus is faithful and invites us to put our full weight in Him, as He will not let us down. The preacher also highlights the presence of evil in the world and the need for all of us to turn to God for forgiveness and a fresh start. He explains that becoming a child of God is like being born again and finding a new sense of belonging and freedom through Jesus' sacrifice.

Transcript

Hear the Word of God this morning as it's written in John's Gospel, chapter 1, reading at verse 1 through to the end of verse 14. John, chapter 1 at verse 1. John writes, In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Through him all things were made, without end, and without end. Nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it. There came a man who was sent from God. His name was John.

He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light. He came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, children born not of natural descent nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Amen. John chapter 1, verse 12, to all who received him, to those who believed on his name, he gave the right to become children of God. Let us pray.

Let your gospel come now, O Lord, not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with deep conviction. Amen. In 1968, an American submarine named the Scorpion suddenly disappeared from the sky.

It was missing from the radar screens. It went missing on its maiden voyage with 99 men aboard. It lost contact with the base, and after a diligent search, the rescue party found only a few remaining pieces of the submarine floating on the surface of the Pacific Ocean.

Investigators were concerned to reconstruct precisely what had happened to this flowering of technology in submarines, and from among the pieces collected, it was discovered that some of the bulkheads had been incorrectly welded, that they had not been welded properly. And when the submarine got deep enough, they surmised that the pressure popped the riveting, and a few holes were opened in the cover of the submarine, and the seawater began to pour in with tremendous force. And under the tremendous pressure, the sailors were literally scalded to death as the submarine became a living pressure cooker.

And when the pressure reached a particular point, they think that the whole thing finally just collapsed inward, that it caved in, destroying not only the submarine, but of course everything that was on board. This tremendous pressure had destroyed the submarine. For many people, life often reaches that kind of a pressure point at one time or another.

The pressures and the stresses and the strains of daily living get to us, and we reach a point where it no longer seems possible to carry on. We just don't think we'll be able to stand it any longer. Our lives seem to be collapsing inward.

Sometimes the pressure comes from money, from finances. A business failure or unemployment might mean that you can no longer meet your obligations at the end of the month. How do you cope when you lose your job or when your expenses are greater than your income and the wolf is at the door? Tremendous pressure.

It might be the pressure of a failing marriage or a family that seems to be disintegrating. What do you do when your husband or your wife walks out on you? How do you cope when those you love are slipping away from you? Sometimes the pressure comes from your job, where there is tremendous pressure to achieve daily in order to survive, and you're under pressure constantly to produce more and more with less and less. Or perhaps some of you face the pressure of school to get better grades with less time for study.

How do you live with those daily pressures? Sometimes the pressure comes from sickness or from pain or from illness or from disease, and every day becomes a struggle as life becomes more and more unbearable. How do you cope with such pressure? In the Bible, Jesus said, I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly. But what really is abundant life in our world today? What is life lived

to the fullest? Life that is whole.

Life that is complete. Life that is satisfying. Life that makes sense.

Life that has purpose. Life that is everlasting. The Apostle Paul says in one of his letters that if any person is in Christ, that person is a new creation.

The old is gone and the new has come. But what does it mean to be a new person in the kind of world in which we live? How can you discover life that is new? Life that is transformed. Life that gives strength and meaning and purpose to face the tremendous pressures and struggles that we all face day in and day out? Well, this little verse in John's Gospel, in the opening chapter of John's Gospel, tells us how.

John says, Yet to all who received Jesus, to those who believed in the name of Jesus, he gave the right to become children of God. You see, this text tells us how to find new life. This text tells us what it means to become a Christian.

And some of you are here this morning and you've been Christians for many years. And some of you are here this morning and you've just become a Christian, perhaps through Mission Ontario. And some of you are here this morning and you're not sure that you're a Christian.

And some of you are here this morning and perhaps God wants to speak to you this morning about what it means to become a Christian. This text tells us how to become a Christian in the midst of life, the midst of life as we know it. First of all, this verse in John's Gospel tells us that becoming a Christian means receiving Christ.

Yet to all who received him, to all who received Christ. Now to receive Christ means to open your life to Christ. To receive Christ means to accept Christ into your life, to embrace him as your friend.

To receive Christ means being vulnerable. It means taking a chance that there just might be a God in this universe who can make a difference to your life amid the tremendous pressures that you face. But it means being willing to let down your guard.

Most of us build walls around our lives. They are walls of protection. They are walls of self-preservation.

But they become walls of isolation. And we build them usually in response to the hurts and the abuses and the betrayals that we've experienced. And we build them so that we can withstand the pressures of life as they bear down upon us.

But for many people, even though they've built these walls and they've constructed them carefully over a long period of time, and they've built them thick and they've built them strong, nevertheless, when the pressures come, there often is a moment when the walls of your life will no longer withstand the pressures. And the fortress of our lives begin to collapse inward. But Jesus says in the Bible that he stands at the door and knocks.

Jesus stands at the door of our lives and he knocks, waiting to be invited in. He will not come crashing in as some uninvited guest, as an annoying telemarketer who's always on the phone to you, as an uninvited salesperson. No, he comes in when he's asked, when he's invited, when he's accepted, when we open our lives to him.

And that, my friends, involves a kind of childlike faith. The Bible says that Jesus comes to those who accept him with childlike faith. On the Friday night of Mission Ontario, I wanted to go down to the Sky Dome because I hadn't been able to get down on the Wednesday or the Thursday due to other commitments.

And I decided at the last moment that I would go down on the Friday, and I took my six-year-old son Grant with me. And we were sitting in one of the sections, and when Ralph Bell got up to preach, he listened intently, my six-year-old son, to that whole message. I don't know how long it was, but he sat there and he listened because I kept looking over at him.

And when the time came for the invitation, he wanted to go forward. And so I asked him if he knew why people were going down to the field on Sky Dome, and he said that they were going down. He said to me, Daddy, those people are going down to receive Christ.

And so I asked him why he wanted to go down, because I wanted to make sure that he just did not want to stand on the pitching mound where Juan Guzman delivers his 95-mile-per-hour pitches. But he said this to me. He said, These people want to accept Jesus, and I want to show others that I accept Jesus, too, that I love and that I follow Jesus.

So down we went. Down we went. And as I stood on the field with my son, I couldn't help but be reminded that this is the kind of faith that is saving faith, childlike faith in which we are willing to be vulnerable and open and accept and invite Christ into our lives.

Becoming a Christian means receiving Christ, opening your life to him. But secondly, this verse goes on in John's Gospel and tells us that becoming a Christian involves believing in the name of Jesus. The text goes on, Yet to all who received him, to those who believed on his name.

To believe in the name of Jesus is to say that Jesus alone can save me, that Jesus alone can help me, that salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to us by which we can be saved. That I can't help myself, and that I need someone to help me. To believe in the name of Jesus is to acknowledge that he is Lord of the universe, creator of heaven and earth.

To believe in the name of Jesus is to confess that he was sent by God the Father into the world to save us, that he died on a cross for our sins, and that he was raised so that we might have new life. But faith is more than acknowledging all of that. It is more than affirming that something is true.

It involves more than intellectual assent. It is more than a mind game. It is personal trust.

Faith is personal trust. To believe in the name of Jesus is to trust in Jesus Christ as if your very life depended on him. To place your confidence in him, to put your full weight down upon him.

That's what the word in the New Testament literally means to relax, to rest, to have faith is to put your full weight down upon Christ. You see, we all need to trust in something or in someone. Some of us trusted in parents, and even parents sometimes let us down, parents sometimes abuse.

Some of us have trusted in education, but after graduation we did not get the jobs that we had been promised. Some of us trust in our employers only to find ourselves in the unemployment line. Some of us trust in friends and then tragically discover that even friends sometimes betray us.

Some of us trust in material prosperity, in money in the bank and in insurance policies only to find that that too is fleeting, that companies go insolvent and bankrupt. The week before we moved from Newmarket to Leaside in April, I received a letter from my insurance broker informing me that the company which held our car insurance and our house insurance and a couple of other insurance policies had gone bankrupt. It had gone into receivership.

That I had no car insurance, that I had no house insurance and that a couple of other policies were also in jeopardy. You see, some of us have had experiences that have hurt us so deeply that we are not prepared to trust anything or anyone anymore. We don't trust politicians, we don't trust government, we don't trust big institutions, we don't trust multinational corporations, we don't trust unions and we don't trust the church.

We've come to the end of ourselves and the end of each other. You see, we are living at a time when the trust account of our culture, if I might put it this way, is dramatically overdrawn. And in the midst of this mistrust, there stands one with outstretched arms who is faithful and who invites us, having come to the end of everything else, to trust in him, to believe in him, to put our full weight in him because he will not let us down.

A number of years ago, a large crowd gathered at Niagara Falls to see the famous Blondin, the tightrope walker, walk across the falls on a tightrope. It was a clear, bright morning. The sun glistened on the cascading torrent as it rushed over the precipice and from below came the ceaseless thunder of the plundering cataract.

And the world's greatest tightrope walker, Blondin, briefly tested the taut strand of the rope that had been stretched across the gorge. And then he took his long pole and balancing himself, he began to make his way across, first slowly testing each step, the crowd watching with great intensity as he moved step by step forward across until he reached the other side safely. And then with the same care, he carefully made his way back across and jumped down off the other end platform back into the crowd and then he made a sensational offer.

He would cross the falls again on a tightrope. But this time, he would take someone on his back. Who was willing to go? Picking out a spectator at random, he asked, do you believe that I am able to carry you across this falls without dropping you? Yes, came back the answer.

Yes, sir, I believe you. Well then, let's go. Not on your life.

And the man disappeared into the crowd and he asked the question again and again and everyone said that they believed that Blondin could go across the gorge. They had seen it. They had witnessed it.

But not one person was willing to trust Blondin with their life until finally someone did step forward. Someone believed enough to trust his life into Blondin's hands and across they went. And back they came.

You see, that's what it means to believe in Christ. To trust him for your life. To put your whole life in his hands.

Becoming a Christian is believing, trusting in Jesus. Thirdly and finally, this verse in John's Gospel tells us that becoming a Christian involves becoming a child of God. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed on his name, he gave the right to become the children of God.

Becoming a Christian is sort of like going home again. We were created to be God's children. We were created to be part of God's family.

We were created to live in fellowship with God. But sin and evil and the horrific destruction of our world, these things have wreaked havoc in our lives. The language of sin is not very popular in our culture today.

But most people know that something is askew in our world. That something is just not right. That something is off-kilter.

That things are just not the way they're supposed to be. The trial that is presently unfolding in this city day by day has provided a window into a culture of evil. A culture of evil out of control.

The bombs being dropped in Bosnia remind us that evil explodes through human sinful actions. And the killing fields of Rwanda have revealed the horrific evil which lurks not very far into the souls of men and of women. And the Bible says that we are all implicated in this.

That we all need God. That this is our problem. That we all need God.

And the Bible tells us that this is the very reason why Christ came. The Bible invites us to turn from our sin. And that sense that we all have that we know that our lives are not right.

That becoming a child of God is like being born again. An overused and yet profoundly Biblical concept. It is like being given a new start.

It is like getting a fresh grip on life. It is like finding the freedom that only forgiveness brings. It is like finding a new family, a new home, a new place of belonging, a new community.

It is believing that Jesus died for me. For my sin. For my evil.

For me. Becoming a child of God is finding God. And being welcomed back in to the family of God by grace.

In his book *Life After God*, Douglas Copeland has uncovered the spiritual hunger of his generation, Generation X. And in the words of one of his desperate, burnt-out characters in *Search of Grace* at the end of this book of short stories, he quotes these words, which I have quoted before, but I think they are so illuminating of where we are at this moment in our culture here in Canada. He says this in the words of his character, My secret is that I need God. He says, I'm going to let you in on a secret.

And my secret is that I need God. That I am sick and I can no longer make it alone. I need God to help me give because I no longer seem capable of giving.

To help me be kind as I no longer seem capable of kindness. To help me love as I seem beyond being able to love. That describes, I suggest to you, a culture burning out of control with people who are desperately longing for God.

And perhaps Douglas Copeland's secret is your secret this morning. Perhaps you need God. Perhaps you need to become a Christian.

Perhaps you need to receive Christ, to believe in his name, and to become a child of God. One of my favorite contemporary musicians, rock musicians, is Eric Clapton. In the 1970s, Eric Clapton, describing

how he had become a Christian in one of his songs, put it this way, I have finally found a way to live, like I never could before.

And I know I don't have much to give, but I can open any door. I have finally found a way to live in the presence of the Lord. Have you found a way to live amid all the pressures, amid all the problems, amid all the stresses of life? Have you found a way to live? I invite you this morning, by faith, to give your life to Jesus Christ.

For to all who receive him, to those who believe in his name, he gives the right to become children of God. Let us pray. Some of us here this morning have been Christians for many years, and this message has simply been a reminder of what our faith is all about.

Some of us are new Christians, and we need the assurance of our faith. May you receive that assurance this morning. Some of us are not sure about our faith, and need this morning, in the grace of God, and by courage, to open your lives to Jesus Christ, and to accept him as Savior and Lord.

I'm going to pray, and would all of you, in your own hearts and minds, pray with me. Lord Jesus Christ, I admit that I have sinned against God and against others, and have gone my own way. I repent of my self-centeredness.

I thank you for your great love in dying for me, for bearing in my place the penalty of my sins, and now I open the door of my heart to you. Come in, Lord Jesus. Come in as my Savior to cleanse and renew me.

Come in as my Lord to take control of me and to help me live, and by your grace, I will serve you faithfully, in fellowship with your disciples, all of my life. Amen.

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