

November 29, 2015

Salvation Comes From the Lord

A couple of weeks ago there was a huge controversy stirring in our nation. Thousands, maybe millions, were drawn into the conflict with strong words exchanged on both sides. The controversy was, of course, caused by the advertising team at Starbucks decision to use a plain red cup for their drinks during the holidays. According to the media, Christians were outraged that Starbucks would make such an anti-Christmas, anti-Christ decision.

In talking with many of those that I would call Christian I couldn't find even a single one who was outraged, or for that matter, even vaguely concerned about Starbucks' choice. So, I started to wonder, what is the problem here? How does the media define "Christian" or maybe more to the point, How would I define that term in my own mind?

The term Christian is actually not used that often in Scripture; only three times in fact. In Acts 11 Luke tells us that the followers of Jesus, or disciples, were ***"...called Christians first at Antioch."*** Later in the same book, Luke records that King Agrippa told the Apostle Paul, ***"Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?"***

Finally, the Apostle Peter uses the term in his first letter where he writes, ***"However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name."*** In my search for a definition of the term Christian, Scripture was of limited help. Originally the term may even have been derogatory, but eventually it came into common use to refer to those who followed Jesus, or more literally, were his disciples.

So, if I want to define in my own mind what it means to be a Christian I would, I think, want to discover what it means to be a follower or disciple of Christ Jesus and to understand that, I should probably begin with those who first followed him.

If we study the life of Jesus we discover that for the first thirty years or so he lived a pretty normal life, growing up in Nazareth, learning from his father Joseph to be a carpenter, and eventually taking care of his mother and brothers. At about age thirty Jesus began his public ministry by visiting the Jordan River and experiencing the baptism of John. Following this the Master spent forty days and nights in the wilderness in an extended fast, and finally began his teaching ministry.

As Jesus begins to preach in Galilee several noteworthy men begin to spend time with him. Among these are Peter and his brother, Andrew, and James and his brother, John and not long after this Jesus calls them to follow him, or more literally to become his disciples. ***"Come, follow me,"*** he says, ***"and I will make you fishers of men."*** (Matthew 4:19)

These men were the first disciples, or followers of Jesus. They began to travel about with him while he preached and taught and performed miracles. These followers or disciples would spend the next three years with the Master following him and living with him and learning from him.

So, the first part of my working definition of the term "Christian" would include those who followed him at the beginning of his ministry and include I believe, those who still follow Jesus today. So, Christians were and still are those who follow Jesus and seek to live by his teachings.

There is more to this than just following Jesus though. The Master himself added to our understanding of what it means to be his follower when he said, ***"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for me will find it."*** (Matthew 16:24-25)

Following Jesus or being a Christian then, means more, much more than just "going to church". If I decide to follow Jesus then I must go where he goes and do what he did. If I would choose to follow Jesus, then I must empty myself as he emptied himself. I must pick up my cross and follow him to the hill top. I must lose my life as he lost his. Deciding to follow Jesus is no small matter. The road he walked is clearly laid out before me. The choice to follow him means that I will take that same road to the cross, to the grave, and eventually to his home.

