

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

Why I am a Christian

Presented by John Edmondstone

I was thinking about the past recently. I'm sure you have those moments when you too think back over your past. Sometimes it brings sadness, sometimes it brings joy. I thought of times that filled me with regret for my mistakes. But then my mind travelled over the period when I became a Christian, which did not mean I stopped making mistakes. I thought of missed opportunities in my youth and later too. And then I began to think of the influences that finally made me come to the most important decision in my life, that changed the direction of my life. I became a Christian. I moved from knowing about Jesus Christ to knowing Him as my personal Saviour. And this morning I want to share my experience with you.

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Well, let me continue sharing with you, "Why I am a Christian". I reluctantly went to Sunday school as a child but as the second youngest of six I created enough headaches to be allowed not to go. It was as an early teenager I started to take notice of the families surrounding us. They were different, not perfect, but there was a certain quality to their lives, a quality I didn't have. It wasn't long before I discovered they attended a local Church. Ultimately I accepted an invitation to join with other teenagers and started to attend. My neighbours lived what they believed. I realized that I needed to make a commitment to Jesus Christ and become a Christian. Attending Church is great but it doesn't mean you're a Christian any more than standing in a garage makes you a car. When the meaning of Christ's death on a cross, taking our place and bearing our sins and then rising from the tomb on the third day, burst into my mind as I read the New Testament, I responded to His invitation "Follow Me."

In later years, after training for the Ministry and pastoring Churches and later travelling overseas the marvel of Christian fellowship became so real. I began to read of men and women who had made such a great contribution to humanity. For example slavery was abolished.

Some would say "Isn't it strange that a Jewish carpenter dying on a Roman cross in the first century could have such appeal to varied races, classes and nationalities? But on second thought, it isn't surprising at all. This is exactly as Jesus said it would be, did He not say "I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men to myself. (John 12:32). And you know, that is what is happening today. People of all ages, of all classes, of all nations and nationalities, the rich and the poor. Isn't this amazing! The Son of God hanging on a cruel cross, dead and buried but rising on the third day, ascending to Heaven and promising to return but in the meantime giving us the power to live by His spirit – the promised Comforter.

Listen while I try to explain His drawing power or put it another way - His magnetism. His is the magnetism of love and forgiveness. Read the New Testament and you discover people were drawn to Him because of His love. All kinds of people, strong men, little children, yes, and sinners were attracted to Him. You know, the failures, dropouts, the guilty, the needy, the lonely. I came across this wonderful phrase "the magnetism of the Cross" and that's what I discovered as a teenager. A cross so cruel bore a Saviour who loved me so dearly to give His life for me, and friends, for you. That is love at its deepest.

Love has a magnetic appeal. Where can we go to see the love of God today? We do not see it in the sun or the stars or the moon. We do not see it in nature. Yes, they speak to us of the glory of God, the majesty of God, the power of God. Walk along the beaches and see the beauty of God's handiwork but all of those can know destruction and devastation. I ask you, where do you see the Love of God? The place you can see the love of God in all of its glory and splendour is in the cross of Calvary. Herein is love – God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” Yes, John 3:16 in our New Testament.

Another reason I, and many others, were drawn to the Cross of Christ and are still drawn to it, is that because of His death on the cross we have found forgiveness for our sins.

You may know the story of John Newton, a man who fell so deeply, who ultimately found forgiveness in Christ and was able to write the best known hymn in all the world – listen to some words

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost but now am found
Was blind but now I see

And this verse:

‘Twas grace that taught my heart to fear
And grace my fears relieved
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Certainly that was amazing grace – from being a slave trader John Newton found in the Christ of the Cross the forgiveness that only Christ can bring. That's why he became a Christian and why I did too. I experienced that gracious forgiveness. John Newton went on to work with William Wilberforce who finally after a long struggle saw the abolition of slavery. Many to whom I speak today have experienced the magnetism of divine love and forgiveness.

Let me suggest you pick up the New Testament and read the Gospels. You might start at Matthew and work your way through Mark, Luke and John. Do it slowly but take in the words of the birth, life death and resurrection of Jesus and note how time is given to His death on the Cross by the writers of the Gospels who recorded what Jesus said and did when He walked this earth.

We are discussing this morning “Why I Am a Christian” and we have talked about the magnetism of His death on the cross.

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We have noted the magnetism of His love and now let's talk about the magnetism of forgiveness that His death and resurrection bring to all who put their trust in Him. The Bible is filled with marvellous promises of God's full and complete forgiveness. In the Old Testament the prophet Isaiah wrote of the coming Christ – “I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions and I will not remember your sins (Isaiah 43:25) and that prophecy was totally fulfilled. David in the Psalms wrote, “I acknowledge my sin to you oh God; I will confess my transgressions and you forgive my sins.” (Psalm 32:5)

On a hill called Calvary Jesus paid the debt for us all when He died for us on a cruel cross. Even to a repentant thief hanging on a cross next to Him Jesus said, "You are forgiven" and the New Testament reminds us that to Paul He said, "You are forgiven" and he was a persecutor of the worst kind. To a greedy, money grabbing cheat Jesus said, "You are forgiven"; to a woman living an immoral life He also said, "You are forgiven"; to the blood thirsty crowd and the cruel soldiers who crucified Him Jesus said, "Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). And do you know, to us He will say, "You are forgiven". Have you had that experience? He offers us the same full and free pardon for our sin. There are two Bible verses that tell us exactly what we must do to experience God's forgiveness. First we must confess our sins (I John 1:9). Then we must turn away from our sin and put our faith in Christ (Act 3:19). In other words we must own and disown our sin then God will forgive us because of Christ's death for us on the cross.

There is the promise of new life. That does not mean that suddenly our lives become white as snow but it does mean our failures, our mistakes, do not cancel out the love of Christ nor the forgiveness of God. It does not mean either that we can go on our way thinking we can please ourselves, for the evidence of our being a Christian is seen in our way of life, our commitment to Christ, our desire to join in fellowship with other Christians and our desire to share the good news of the Gospel with others. Yes, we will fail but we'll stand up again and move on. Christians are not perfect, but they **are** forgiven and we are to use an old expression "saved to serve".

Napoleon after he was defeated at Waterloo was exiled on the Island of Saint Helena. One day he was poring over a map of Europe that had the British Isles outlined in red. He said to a companion "Do you see that red spot? Were it not for that red spot I would have conquered the world." Were it not for the red spot we call Calvary where Jesus conquered death and sin the victory would have been one of evil. But it is not so for in the death of Christ for the forgiveness of our sins and yes, over death itself, we can know the promise of eternal life. The way of the cross is the way to love. It is the way to forgiveness, it is the way to victory and it is the way home. That's why I am a Christian.

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Finally, if you would like to read further or would like a copy for a friend or family member I will send you without obligation a booklet titled "What is a Real Christian?" Write to "Sunday at 7.30" at 2CH, P.O. Box 4290 GPO Sydney; or email jedmondstone@2ch.com and leave your address and I will happily send you a copy or copies without obligation.

Prayer: Father, our one desire in life is to know your Son as our Saviour and friend and to live for Him and with Him daily. AMEN