

Something basic: what is a Christian?

- Happy clappy, fun for youngsters, and fanatics
- Rather gullible people who believe fairy stories, but are quite OK to have around, and it's nice for them
- priests, robes, cathedrals ... tourist attraction, but no relevance to today
- Hiding place for child-abusers, hypocrisy and cruelty
- Someone who tries their best to be good, and whose good deeds outweigh their bad deeds (hopefully)
- Unknown ... something worth investigating ...
- Something worth becoming ...?
- **What did Jesus say?**

Something basic: what is a Christian?

What did Jesus say?

Answer by looking at this fundamental Christian text

Gospel = first-hand biography of Jesus, good news

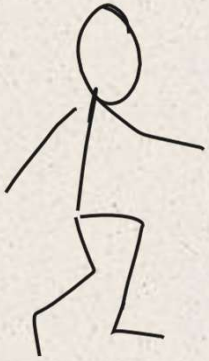
John's gospel = written by an eyewitness, "beloved disciple" = John (fisherman → apostle = authorised spokesperson for Jesus)

John's gospel chapter 3

Something basic: what is a Christian?

- John 3: Very famous
 - Contains the sentence (verse)
 - *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”*
- John 3:16

Something basic: what is a Christian?



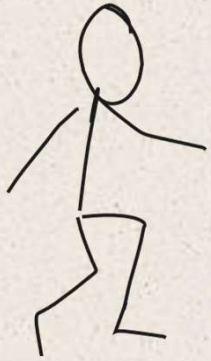
- Account of Jesus one-to-one with Nicodemus
- 3:1 member of the Jewish ruling council
- → ethnically Jewish (God's historic people)
- → high-up ... MP

- 3:10 "Israel's teacher" → professor of theology
- 3:2 "Rabbi" → respectful ... a gentleman

- → going to be a very interesting interview!



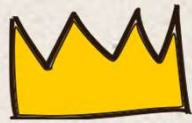
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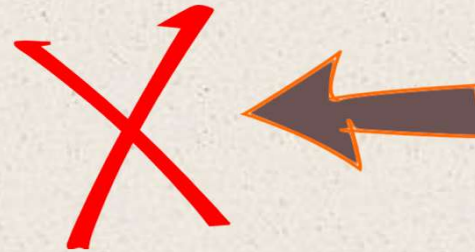
3:1-8

“impossibility”

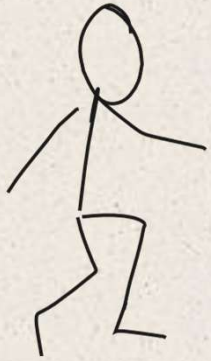
- Nicodemus: *impossible for you to do signs without God*
- Jesus: *impossible for you to see the Kingdom of God unless born again*



- → *HOW v.4??*
- → *human impossibility ...*



Something basic: what is a Christian?



- *Becoming a Christian is a human impossibility*

- *→ not a matter of Western racial privilege*

- *→ not a matter of non-Western racial privilege*

- *→ not a matter of Jewish ethnic heritage*

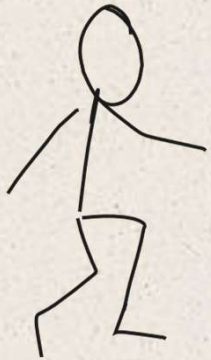
1:13

→ not a matter of “trying harder” – moral effort

→ Not adopting a culture e.g. dance, clothing, ascetism (e.g. “a Christian is someone who doesn’t smoke and doesn’t go to the cinema”)

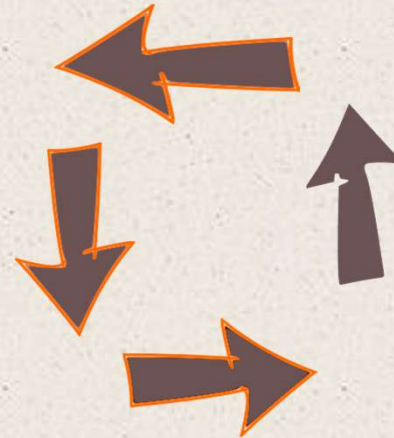
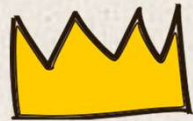


Something basic: what is a Christian?



3:1-8

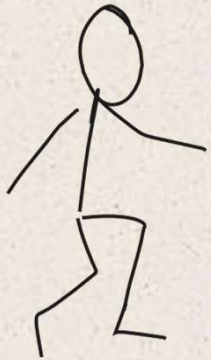
*Impossible unless born of “water and Spirit”
Flesh gives birth to flesh, Spirit gives birth to spirit*



Flesh = human power without God

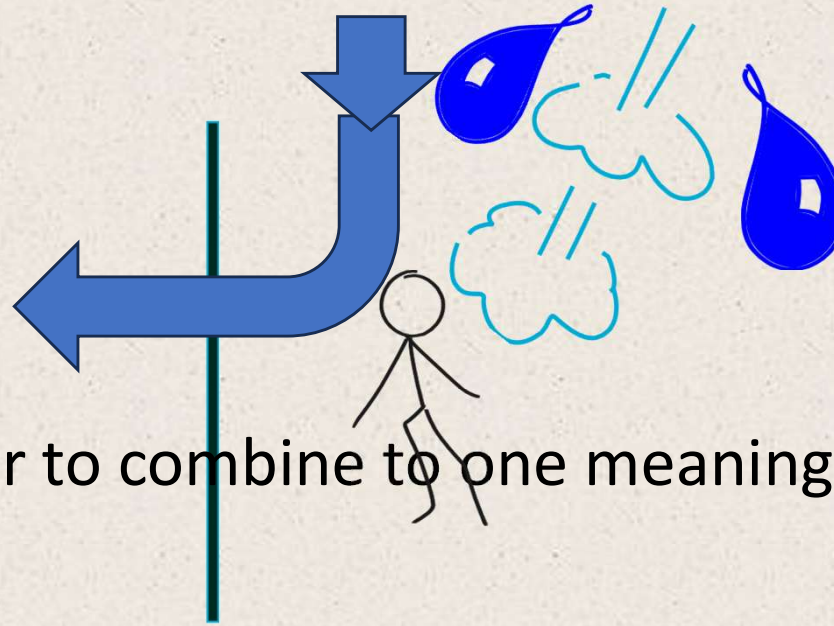
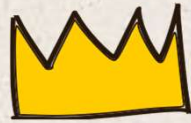
- ➔ NOT Intellectual power
- ➔ NOT Body-building power
- ➔ NOT moral power
- ➔ NOT Religious power e.g. pilgrimages, spiritual disciplines

Something basic: what is a Christian?



3:1-8

Impossible unless born of “water and Spirit”



Proposal: hendiadys

= two words put together to combine to one meaning

e.g. sound and fury

e.g. nice and warm

- ➔ Born of the “watery Spirit”, “Spirit who in some ways is poured out like water”
- ➔ Supernatural, by the unseen power of God
- ➔ Born “from the top”, a Christian is a miracle!

Something basic: what is a Christian?

→ Becoming a Christian is a supernatural miracle by the unseen work of the Spirit of God

→ *“you (plural) must be born again”*

N.B. if that was true for Nicodemus and his fellow Jews, how much more true for us ...

→ e.g. George Whitefield ...

→ N.B. Good news but not good news

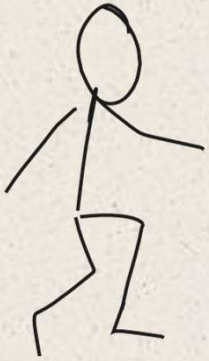
Did you make yourself “born” in the flesh?

Can you make yourself “born” by the Spirit??

= a necessity, but an impossibility?

(Where’s the good news??)

Something basic: what is a Christian?



3:9-13

- There is an ignorance and blindness in the Hebrew Scriptures without Christ
- “you are the teacher, and you don’t understand these things”???

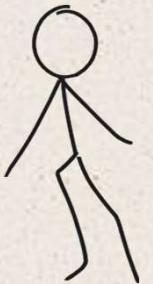
- Jesus (+Spirit?) = “we”
- Testify – things known and seen
- → the dependability of Jesus’ teaching
- → *if you want to find out, then ask God to show you whether Jesus is true ... only he can be absolutely depended upon*

Something basic: what is a Christian?

3:14-18

Q: You just said becoming a Christian is an impossible miracle – so do I just wait around for it to happen to me?

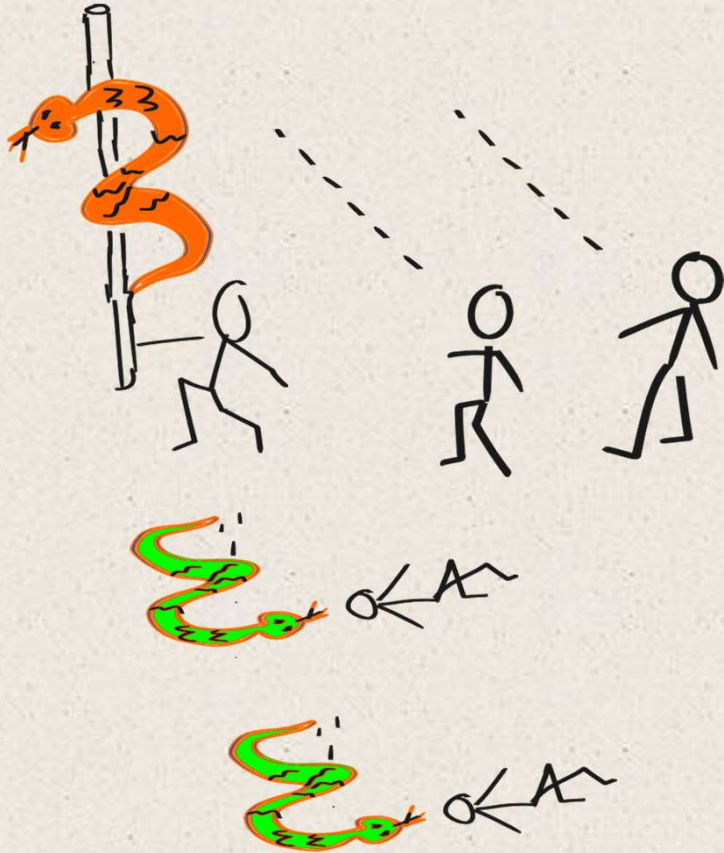
A: No – there is a “person-to-person” place for you to fit in with. There is a person who deals in impossibilities
N.B. “The Son of Man must be lifted up”
= Jesus executed by cruel impalement on a wooden cross



Something basic: what is a Christian?

3:14-18

*“snake lifted up in the desert
... Son of Man lifted up ... believe ... eternal life”*



Back story (Numbers 21:4-9)

- Crossing the desert from Egypt to promised land.*
- People were abusive and grumbled ... God sent snakes as punishment ... snake bite -> death*
- People confessed their wrong*
- Moses ... bronze snake ... those who looked were healed*

Something basic: what is a Christian?



N.B. snake = “enemy King of the desert”

//Like colonial hunters in a bygone era killing dangerous Lion and putting stuffed head on wall as a trophy to ridicule the Lion//

Jesus impaled in humiliation, and defeat ...

- But he is not our dangerous enemy, but our Friend.

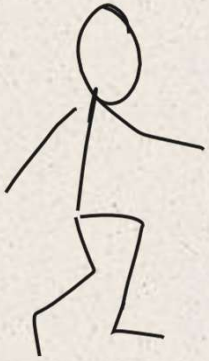
- → look // trust → eternal life

Q: Am I welcome to do that?

A: Of course ... God loved the world ...

A: yes ... God sent his Son not to condemn but to save

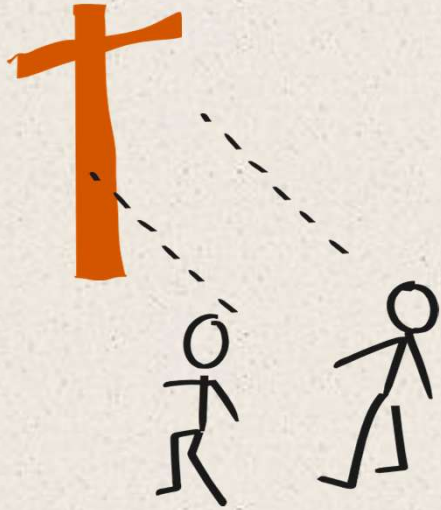
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- Not by own personal achievement
- *You must be born again by the power of God*
 - *= human impossibility*
- **Believing Jesus' testimony** ... he knows what he is talking about – do you not find him trustworthy?
- **Looking to Christ's cross** ... so that everyone who trusts in him (even in his deep humiliation and apparent defeat) will have eternal life

Only two responses...

Something basic: what is a Christian?



In the end only two responses (only two!)

3:19-21

“hate/reject the light ... come to the light”

A Christian is someone who comes to the light.

- ➔ How will you be dealing with this?
- ➔ Accepting that you must be born again? Still DIY? *Flesh gives birth to flesh*
- ➔ Believing the testimony of Jesus? *He knows what he is talking about*
- ➔ Look at Jesus lifted up. What do you see? *Do you find your eyes opened?*
- ➔ Can you see cross is an act of unjustified love. *Will you not receive it as such, with gratitude?*
- ➔ And be a Christian yourself?

