

WEIGHING IT UP

Christianity is not just about forgiveness. It's about a new and changed life. To share our life with God means we align our everyday life with the design and purposes of our creator. This inevitably means big, long-term changes. Jesus warns us not to become Christians if we're not prepared to bring our lives in line with him. In this study we'll look at what it means to receive God's forgiveness, the gift of eternal life, and the implications for the rest of our lives.

Matthew 8:19-22 Then one of the teachers of religious law said to him, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." But Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens to live in, and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place even to lay his head."

Another of his disciples said, "Lord, first let me return home and bury my father." But Jesus told him, "Follow me now. Let the spiritually dead bury their own dead."

The phrase "first let me return home and bury my father" probably didn't mean that the disciple's father had just died and that he wanted to go to the funeral! Instead, he was asking if he could postpone following Jesus and work for his father until his father died.

- Why do you think Jesus talked so strongly to such a deeply religious man and to another who was already identifying himself with Jesus?
- Why do you think Jesus seems to be discouraging both of them from following him?

Jesus gives two examples of the cost of following him. Foxes and birds feel at home in the world. Those who follow the priorities of those around them experience little conflict. But, those who follow Jesus will not fit easily into the world and may experience rejection from those they love.

- What might these warnings mean for us?
- What do you think would be some of the changes involved in following Jesus wholeheartedly?
- The term "gospel" means "good news". Why would choosing to follow Jesus be seen as a good thing?

John 3:1-7 There was a man named Nicodemus, a Jewish religious leader who was a Pharisee. After dark one evening, he came to speak to Jesus. "Rabbi," he said, "We all know that God has sent you to teach us. Your miraculous signs are evidence that God is with you."

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Nicodemus. "How can an old man go back into his mother's womb and be born again?"

Jesus replied, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit. Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.'"

CONTINUED ON OTHER SIDE...

- According to Jesus, what was Nicodemus missing?
- What does it mean to be born physically?
- How is this like becoming a Christian?
- In terms of length, what's the difference between the life we have with our first birth and the life we would have with our second birth?

John 1:12-13 But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn – not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

- What promise does Jesus give in these verses?
- What does it mean to believe Jesus and to accept him?

The word "believe" in this verse is a verb which literally means to put your trust in someone. For example, it would not be enough to say you trusted my driving. To believe, in this sense, would mean getting in the car with me behind the wheel. "Believing" or putting your trust in Jesus involves:

- Agreeing with God that you are sinful and cut off from him
 - Believing God to forgive you completely because Jesus died to pay the penalty for your sins
 - Choosing to turn away from anything that would hold you back and letting Jesus take first place in your life
- What do you understand by this?
 - Does it make sense?

Philippians 3:7-9 I once thought these things [my own credentials and spiritual achievements] were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as rubbish, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteousness through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith.

- What has the writer gained?
- How important is it to him?
- How does this affect his view of life?
- What does Paul mean when he says "I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteousness through faith in Christ"?
- How could knowing Jesus be such a big deal?

In the next study we will continue to consider how we can connect with God.