

The LIFE...
The Decision of Faith

If you could sum up for life in one word or sentence, what would it be? Whatever the word(s), it would have to involve someone or something which you have a high investment. Maybe it would include a personality trait, or physical trait. Maybe it would just be your name, but think about it and write it down. We're going to look at it later.

Tonight we are starting a new series entitled "The Life". It could be better described as "The Life of Faith" or "A Life for Christ", but really what we're centering on for the next few weeks is what it means to be a follower of Christ and what it looks like to truly follow Him. Some of you are going to be like, "I know this stuff already, and I've been going to church forever". That might be the case, but the bible tells us to

2Co 13:5 Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? 2Co 13:6 And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test.

The bible tells us to examine ourselves and see if we are really in the faith? These next few weeks might be a good time to really ask yourself the question, "Am I really a Christian, do I really believe this? Or did I just pray a prayer to get 'it' over with so people don't bother me".

So let's start by asking the question, "Why should I become or be a Christian?" What are some of your answers, why did you become a Christian? If someone were to ask you, why should they become a Christian or "Get Saved" what would you say and why?

For those of you who were here Sunday, we looked at Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, but at the same time he recognized when God was at work. He comes to Jesus at night and he's looking for something, Jesus tells him "

Jn. 3:3 "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

You see for us to make a life decision to put our faith in and to follow Christ we need to see the need for a new beginning. That's what Jesus meant when He told Nicodemus, "you must be born again". Nicodemus needed to understand if he was going to follow Christ he was going to need a fresh start. Now the next question is why? Why do I need a fresh start? Why do I need a new beginning? You tell me, why would anyone need a new beginning?

When we admit we need or want a new beginning, we're saying that something isn't right with the one we currently have, there's something about it we don't like or we don't want. Spiritually speaking, when we want a new life or when we want a new start it has to do with sin. It's either our sin, when we mess up or make mistakes. Or it's the sin of another person, and we deal with the consequences for that sin (examples)

The bible tells us a few major things about sin. The bible tells us that sin cost (Rom. 6:23), that when someone sins someone has to pay for that sin, w/ death. In the Old Testament they would use animals and the animal would have to die for the sin of the person. Those animals were pictures of what Jesus would do for us on the cross. Not only does it cost to make sin right, but sin also cost those it's against. So in other words if you lie, you're sinning against God and someone has to pay for that sin. However you're also sinning against the person you're lying to. I'm not sure if anyone has ever lied to you, maybe stolen something from you, how does that

feel. Doesn't it hurt? Sin cost in two ways, it cost to make it right and it cost the person who got hurt.

The second thing about sin that the bible tells us is that sin separates. Go back in your mind to Adam and Eve. Adam and Eve had the perfect life, a perfect relationship with Christ. There was no sin, no hurt, no pain, no crying, not nothing. They had total perfection, them and God hanging out and enjoying creation. Then what happens? They are given one rule, that's it just one. Don't eat that fruit, it's not good for you. If you eat that fruit you'll have to die (remember sin cost). The enemy comes and they believe the lie that it'll actually be ok for them to eat it and sure enough they weren't. So what happens then? The relationship between them and God was broken; the animal dies as a picture of what would happen when Jesus comes. Their relationship dies and their bodies begin to die. They wouldn't have died if they had never sinner, but now we have death because it is a result of sin.

You see we all sin and it isn't until we see how bad that sin is, how much it affects us, and how much it cost do we look at our life and say, "whoa, wait a minute, this isn't working I want to start over". The life that we live apart from God is full of sin, we're separated from our creator and we need to make a decision of whether or not we want relationship with Jesus. Why Jesus?

Jesus comes and he puts back together what was broken, he heals the sick and brings people new life. The bible describes this a "reconciliation", what comes to mind when you think of "reconciling", anyone? Reconciliation is when two are brought back together, if you were in an argument w/ a friend and you guys made up, put the past issue, behind you and went on as if nothing had ever happened that would be a picture of reconciliation. It's not something that we see very often. People forgive and forget, but very few are able to do it as if nothing happened. Listen to how scripture describes this...

2Co 5:14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 2Co 5:15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. 2Co 5:16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 2Co 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 2Co 5:18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 2Co 5:19 that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 2Co 5:20 We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 2Co 5:21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The Old is GONE, and the new has come! Jesus comes so that your relationship with your creator can be restored.

So in order for us to make the decision to follow Christ, we have to understand sin, because we have to understand what we were saved from. Why would you want a new life if the old was ok, it's not until God convicts you of your sin that you are able to see that it's wrong. Once we do this, we make the decision of what to do with it. If we decide, "you know what, yea, it's wrong but so what" then what we are essentially doing is saying. "I'll attempt to pay for my own sin and see what happens" You have that option; however the bible teaches that you'll attempt to pay for your sin in hell. The problem with that is that you'll never pay enough. Remember that sin cost, the price for sin is death. If you choose to attempt to pay for your own sin it'll never be enough because you'll never do enough good things. Remember that God's standard is perfection, it's not what you think is good enough. The second option is to turn away from your sin; the bible describes this as repenting. You turn away from your sin and you turn toward Christ. When this happens Christ comes into your life and takes over. This is where there is

usually some confusion. When Christ comes into your life, you give it to Him, you understand that you need a new life, a new start; you understand what you are saved from. We're good with that, but most of the times we don't want him to take control. We're sorry for what happened, but we don't want him in charge. He'll change things and He'll change you and me, who we are. That's why it's a new beginning. You see we want Jesus as our Savior, but we really don't want Him as Lord. Because that means we are no longer in control. Look at what Jesus says,

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" Jn. 14:6.

Jesus says that if you want to come to God, to have your relationship restored, to have your heart healed, to have your sin's forgiven, great come on that's what I came for. But I want you, all of you. I want all your sin and sadness, I want all your successes and all that you are. I want to use all the gifts I've given you and I want you to walk w/ me so that you can really enjoy life, life to the fullest.

You see guys there's more to a decision of faith in Christ than praying a prayer and coming to church. That's why Jesus told the disciples to count the cost, look at what it's worth to you (Lk 14, Jn 6).

I'm not sure where you are at tonight; maybe you've never truly made this decision. You've gone through the motions and prayed the prayers. Maybe you've made the decision half heartedly; you never really counted the cost. And you really don't want him to be Lord, just your savior. Unfortunately for you, that's not an option. Jesus gave it all, for your all. He takes us as well are, but He wants our full commitment. Are you willing to make it? Maybe you've made a decision and you're sort of like, you know what I made that decision and I haven't been living like it. I need to make things right, I need to recommit. Maybe you're ok with God, you know what I'm talking about tonight and you want more. I just want to urge you to continue. Don't give up, don't get distracted, and continue to push through, trusting God for His promises.

We're going to take a few minutes for you to think through we're you're at tonight. And I want to challenge you and encourage you to wrestle through it. This isn't a minor decision; this is major and will affect every aspect of your life. Pull out that slip of paper that you wrote on in the beginning. In that word or statement, is there anything having to do with your creator? If there is nothing in there about God, do you really have a relationship w/ God or is it only something you do. Remember Jesus is LORD; are you willing to submit to that?

Discussion Options:

Q. How many times does a person have to lie before they are a liar? (Just once)

Q. Most of us do one of three things w/ sin; Hide from it, run from it, or owe up to it. Which one are you the most likely to do, and why?

Q: If you were to talk someone *out* of being a Christian, what sorts of things would you say? Have you ever considered those things as you work through your life? Why or why not, what were your conclusions. (Be specific)

Ask students to talk about the different sins they have committed or know of being committed. Write them on the board in sort of a half moon shape with the arc on the bottom. Point out that each of one of those sins has a person's name attached to it. After you put together a list draw a cross underneath it and explain to the students that when Christ went to the cross, he took on all those sins and all the consequences of those sins. In light of this, ask the students if they can see why Christ demands our all.