

-  
The Cost of Being a Disciple of Christ

34 *“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to turn*

*“a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—36 a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’*

37 *“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.*

40 *“Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. 41 Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. 42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.”*

If someone were to ask you, “How much did you have to pay to become a Christian,” what would you say? What do you say, “I had to pay big bucks for my faith; A major entrance fee; I had to ante up to kind of earn a spot in God’s family”? No, you would say, “God doesn’t charge people to become Christians. God gives away eternal salvation as a free gift, bought and paid for by the blood of Jesus’ Christ. Even our faith is an undeserved gift from God.” And you would be absolutely right.

And yet, even though salvation is free, that doesn't mean that being a follower of Christ comes without a cost. Sometimes there is a price to be paid for being one of Jesus’ disciples. It’s not that God makes us pay. It’s that the world, the devil and our sinful nature makes us pay. In our text for today, Jesus talks about that cost. You might call it:

The Cost of Being a Disciple of Jesus

Our text is a portion of a longer section of Matthew chapter 10, where Jesus is sending out his apostles on their first missionary journey. He tells them what to say, where to go, and what to expect in terms of peoples’ response to the gospel. He warns them that not everyone was going to welcome them with open arms. In fact, that’s where our text for today picks up. Jesus says, *“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”* You hear those words and you say, “Really? I thought Scripture called Jesus the Prince of Peace. Didn't the angels announce at Jesus’ birth that he had come to bring “peace on earth, goodwill to men?” Wasn’t one of Jesus’ favorite greetings the words, “Peace be with you”? Yes, all those things are true. But what kind of peace was Jesus bringing? Was he bringing an end to all military conflicts in the world? No, quite the contrary. Jesus told his disciples that until the day he returns in glory, this world will be marked by what? *“wars and rumors of wars.” (Matthew 24:6)*. There will always be military conflicts. Did Jesus come into this world to make everyone comfortable, put them at ease, so we all just get along? No, Jesus came to bring the most important peace of all. And that’s peace between God and man. Jesus created peace between a holy God who hates sin, and an unholy human race that can't stop

sinning. How did Jesus bridge the gap between those two polar opposites? He did it by offering himself. He offered his perfect life in place of a world full of sinners, so that God could declare every one of us not guilty, for Jesus' sake. That's what puts your heart and mine at peace with God. Jesus is the only one who can give us true spiritual peace.

But there's the rub. The idea that true peace comes only through Jesus. The world doesn't accept the idea that true peace comes only through the life and death and resurrection of someone who lived two thousand years ago. The world doesn't accept the idea that people can't be a peace with each other until they are at peace with God. The world rejects the idea that the only real source of conflict in this world is sin, and the only real solution is Jesus. In fact, the human race, by nature, rejects Jesus. Isn't that what the gospel writer John said, in chapter 1? *[Jesus] was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. (John 1:10-11)*. The entire human race, if left to itself, without the Spirit, will always reject Jesus. It's what Jesus told his disciples in John 15: 18, *"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first."*

Now, because that is true, Jesus goes on to tell his disciples how the world's natural animosity toward him will, in turn, impact their lives—and ours too. Jesus says here in our text, *"I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'"*

Hmm. That doesn't sound good. What does Jesus mean by that? Let's start with what he doesn't mean. Jesus doesn't mean that he came into this world for the purpose of dividing families. His goal in life was not to turn family members against each other. And yet, while that's not his purpose in coming, it will be one of the results of his coming. From the moment that Jesus came to this earth, more specifically, from the moment God promised that Jesus would come to the earth, the whole world has been divided into two camps: those who believe in Jesus and those who don't. And to a certain extent, those two camps have been at war with each other from the very beginning.

Isn't that what God announced in the Garden of Eden, namely, that there would be enmity, that is hostility, between the offspring of Eve and the offspring of Satan, that is, between believers and unbelievers? That hostility showed up in the very first family, when Cain, who the Bible says *"belonged to the evil one, (1 John 3:12)*, that is, he was an unbeliever, in turn expressed his hostility toward God by killing his brother Abel, who was a believer. That same kind of tension, that same hostility between believers and unbelievers has impacted families down through the centuries, including even Jesus' earthly family. What does Scripture say? *Even his own brothers did not believe in him. (John 7:5)* In fact, on one occasion, Jesus' family members came right out and said about Jesus, *"He is out of his mind."* (Mark 3:21)

Tell me, can you relate to what was going on in Jesus' family? Have you ever experienced anything like that in your family? Maybe it starts with a little nonverbal communication. Your daughter rolls her eyes when you turn on the Christian radio station. Your sister furls her brow when she hears that you're taking time to attend church in the middle of a pandemic. Your aunt still has trouble talking to you ever since you joined a Lutheran Church.

Maybe it's not just verbal communication. Maybe you have relatives who come right out and say, "You're stupid for believing in a 6-day creation, or in the biblical roles for men and women." They accuse you of thinking that you're better than everyone else. They say that they feel like you're judging them. It's like your faith is making them uncomfortable.

Where I often see this is in a marriage where one of the spouses is a church-going

Christian and the other one isn't. So often, the unbeliever begins to resent that his or her spouse is taking time away from the family to go to church, or worse yet, taking money away from the budget to support the church. Before you know it, the unbeliever is making life really miserable for the believer. That's exactly what Jesus was talking about when he said here in our text, "*A man's enemies will be members of his own household.*"

I don't know about you, but I'm saddened by the thought that some of you have family members who don't support your Christian faith, who ridicule you for what you believe, or make it hard for you to put your faith into action. But here's something you can take comfort in. Jesus knows exactly what you are going through. Jesus faced opposition from the members of his family, too. Remember when Jesus told his first disciples, "*No servant is greater than his master. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. (John 15:20)*" You might say sometimes, opposition from within our own families, is one of the costs of being a disciple of Jesus.

But now, I have to say that when it comes to divisions in our families, sometimes it's not unbelievers kind of turning their backs on believers. Sometimes it's the other way around. Let me give you an example. Maybe every time you spend the holidays at the home of a particular relative of yours, things go badly. Someone gets drunk. Maybe there's a fight. Your faith takes a beating. Your kids are exposed to stuff that's no good. Finally, you say, "I've had enough. I'm not going back there. If that person wants to come to my place, where I can maintain some control over the situation, fine. But I'm not going back to where things are out of control."

Or here's another one. Your father, who says he's a Christian, decides to leave your mother for another woman. A blatant case of adultery. And what's worse, he's completely unrepentant. And now he wants you to come and meet his new lover. He wants you to pretend that everything is fine. But for the sake of his soul, you say, "No, Dad, I'm not going to condone your behavior. I love you too much to do that. Dad, I have to tell you that if you were going to choose to live your life outside of God's will, then you are also choosing to live your life without me in it."

Or maybe you're forced to make that same decision about a boyfriend who is pushing you to cross the line, sexually speaking, or someone who refuses to support you in your walk with God. As much as you love that person, you may have to say, "I'm sorry, but I have to break off this relationship."

Now, is that easy to do? No, it's hard. But that may be the cost of being a disciple of Christ. That may be the sacrifice you have to make, whether it's you stepping away from an unbeliever you still love, or an unbeliever you still love stepping away from you—all because of your relationship with the person you love more than anyone else. I mean, that's what it all boils down to, doesn't it? Who will be Number One in your heart? Who will you love more? Jesus speaks pretty plainly here in our text, "*Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me;*" In other words, if you love your parents more than you love Jesus, you are really not one of his disciples. And "*anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*" In other words, you really are not even a Christian if you value your relationship to your children more than your relationship to God, Why would Jesus say that? Because that's what idolatry is. It's loving anything more than God. How did Martin Luther Define the first commandment? *We should fear, love and trust in God above all things.*

The question is, how are you doing obeying that one command? Or maybe let's make it just one third of that command. How are you doing just loving God above all things? When your kids want you to do one thing and God wants you to do another, which do you choose? When

loving God means saying “no” to what your sinful nature wants, who do you listen to?

If you're like me, too often the one you love most is not the one up there, it's the one in here: me, myself, my sinful nature. And for that, God would have every reason to say, “Away from me, you idolater!”

But now here's some good news. Instead of punishing me or you for an act of idolatry, God punished his son in our place. Jesus took the rap for all the times that we loved someone else more than we loved God. And because Jesus did that for us, God now offers us full forgiveness and eternal salvation is a free gift.

But as I said before, God's gift of salvation is free. But Christian discipleship isn't. Sometimes being a disciple of Christ comes with a cost. Sometimes, for the sake of our relationship to Christ, we have to let go of some things. We might lose a friend or family member. We need to ditch the work environment that is constantly warring against our souls. Maybe we need to lose the old life that just doesn't line up with God's will for our lives. All those things might be the price we have to pay to be a disciple of Jesus.

But when that happens, remember what Jesus says here in our text. “*Whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.*” In other words, if you have to give up something because of your Christian faith, if you lose part of your life, in fact, if you lose your very life itself, because of your Christian confession (which as the world becomes more violently anti-Christian, isn't that hard to imagine)—still in the end Jesus promises that you will receive an even greater reward. How does Jesus put it in Revelation, chapter 2? “*Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the Crown of Life*” (Revelation 2:10) When you lose your life for Jesus, you find it. Or to put it another way, yes, being a disciple of Jesus may cost you some things in this life. But in the end, it will pay you everything, in the life to come, by God's grace, through faith in Jesus. Amen.