

“Count the Cost”

Really Jesus? Are you serious? “Great crowds” are following you. They’ve heard about the narrow door and they want to enter in and recline at table in the kingdom of God with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the rest. They’ve heard your parable of the Wedding Feast and your Parable of the Great Banquet.

“Great crowds” are following you, and you turn to them and say – “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” Really Jesus! At least you didn’t say anything about hating grandchildren – but still – are you trying to turn everyone off and drive them away?

Folks, Jesus doesn’t want you to turn away – He wants you to follow Him – but He also wants you to “count the cost.” What does it mean to be His disciple – to follow Him? What does it mean to be a Christian – a member of Immanuel – a Christian husband or wife, father or mother, son or daughter?

In order to be a Christian, to follow Christ – He says that one must “bear his own cross and come after me” – and if not, you “cannot be my disciple.”

So what does He mean by “count the cost”? Well, He gives examples to teach us this very thing. “For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him ...”

One who is a Christian – who has been baptized, who trusts in Jesus for forgiveness, life and salvation – if he does not continue to follow Jesus in faith – will be mocked. The world mocks Christians – for they see how many drift away, who have nothing but a foundation – and they conclude that Christianity is a fake – that it’s not anything to be serious about.

“Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not first sit down and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?”

Jesus ramps up the seriousness with what He is saying. This is not just a construction project – this is war – a matter of life and death! When death is on the line – one should give careful deliberation – or it may cost one his life, and the life of others. “And if [he determines that he is not able to win the battle], while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.”

When you are outnumbered – the terms of peace are not in your favor. When you’re waving the white flag – you’re “asking” what the enemy requires of you to spare your lives. Of course, Jesus is speaking about Christians – His disciples – what are the terms of peace with God? What does He require for us to follow Him?

Jesus tells us what the terms are. “So therefore,” He says, “any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.”

Before we wade in too far on what Jesus means by these statements – first it is important for us to realize that when Jesus says these things – He’s on His way to Jerusalem, and His own cross. The narrow door and banquet feast and hating family and bearing our own cross – can only be understood in light of Christ’s own crucifixion.

You want to follow Jesus? Do you know where He is headed? Do you really want to follow Him to that cross? Count the cost. Life is on the line – eternal life! This life now IS important – but often times it is the sole focus of our attention. There is much more on the line – much more than this life – eternal life, a life that has no end.

For your everlasting life, Jesus is headed for the cross. He alone is the sacrifice of atonement. His blood alone blots out all your iniquity. His life alone – given into death – can deliver you from death, and give life forevermore.

Without Christ and His crucifixion, there is no hope for you, no life for you. That is why everything else must be renounced. Nothing else can get in the way of trusting in Jesus for His deliverance and salvation – not your possessions – not your plans – not your own family – and not yourself.

When Jesus says that you are to “hate” your own family members – He means that you are not to “fear, love and trust” in them above God. You are not to put them before God. You must be willing to sacrifice them – if they get in the way of following Jesus.

Of course, you love your family and you want what is best for them – and there is nothing better than Jesus and His life without end. To “fear, love and trust in God above all things” is the BEST THING for you and your family. You want to do good by them? Then “fear, love and trust in God above all things” – follow Jesus – and God willing, they will follow you.

Jesus is telling you to count the cost today. This is serious business – nothing to be taken lightly. “Fear, love and trust” in God – that is, faith in Jesus Christ – is the most important thing in this world and for eternity. Without it – you’re like salt without saltiness – destined for the manure pile. But with it – you are truly a disciple of Jesus Christ – following Him in this world, and in the life eternal.

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear,” Jesus says. I hope He has your attention – and no doubt you may be wondering if you can complete the tower, or defeat the enemy. Can I follow Jesus? If not, should one even start – or should I go my own way now?

Jesus HAS made His way to Jerusalem and His cross – He has put in all the labor necessary for your salvation – and now He desires your ears to hear. To bear your own cross is to deny yourself – not only confessing your sins, but believing there is nothing you can do to achieve salvation – and to trust in Jesus Christ alone.

For He has laid the foundation, cleansing you and making you holy in the waters of Holy Baptism, claiming you as His own. His Word leads you in the way you should go – loving your fellow man – but fearing, loving and trusting in God above all things. His Body and Blood is given to you now – often referred to as “the medicine of immortality” – for where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation – life now, and life forevermore.

So let us follow Jesus now, setting the example of faith and love for our families – bearing our cross of repentance and faith – listening to our Savior – rejoicing to follow Him in these day – and rejoicing with Him and all believers in Christ for all eternity. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.