

INTRODUCTION

Today two sisters will share their salvation testimonies and receive baptism. Every time we have a baptism I will reiterate the fact that baptism does not confer, but it is to confirm one's salvation. The Bible tells us that the moment when one accepts Jesus Christ as his Savior and Lord he is a Christian. Baptism is a means to publicly testify our faith and to give glory to God for our salvation. Another misconception even some Christians have is that salvation is a two-step process. They erroneously think that a person needs to accept Christ and become a believer first. Then some time later when he gets serious he chooses to commit himself to the Lord and become a disciple. In the Bible, believers are disciples. When a person decides to accept Christ he should make up his mind to follow Christ as His disciple. In our passage today Jesus sent an invitation to a crowd that was traveling with Him. Jesus reminded the people to think carefully before they decided to become His disciples. Following Christ is a one-time decision with a life-long commitment. I hope this message is an encouragement to our baptism candidates and to every brother and sister.

EXPLANATION

1. 準備要愛神 Ready to Love

First of all, Jesus told the crowd that to be His disciples they had to be ready to love Him wholeheartedly. Jesus said in **verse 26**: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters - yes, even his own life - he cannot be my disciple." The translators of the Chinese Union Version paraphrased what Jesus meant to say when they chose to use the verb "love," but the NIV translates the verb directly as "hate." Was Jesus saying that we have to cut off all human relationship before we can follow Him? But doesn't the Bible command us to honor our parents (Ephesians 6:2), love others as ourselves (Matthew 22:39); and even love our enemies (Matthew 5:44)? How can we reconcile all the truth above? We can compare Jesus' command here with what He said in **Matthew 10:37**: "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." Luke used an exaggerated tone to say that we should love Him more than anyone else as if we should hate them all. Whereas, Matthew dealt with the priority of whom we should love first. Someone said that the notion is not "loveless" toward our family members but to "love less" compare to loving the Lord. Very often after we accepted Christ the first group of people who show disagreement are those that are closest to us. In the first century if a Jew became a Christian more than likely he would be kicked out of the synagogue. This person might be seen as a traitor to traditional religious belief of his peers. Even nowadays, a person living in the Middle East may face excommunication from the family and community or even face death if he converts from Muslim to Christianity. Although most of our non-believing family members may show more acceptance extreme cases of tearing up Bibles or severing legal parent-child relationship is not unheard of. Once a sister told me that when she was about to go to church her husband stood behind her car in the driveway. The signal is clear: if you want to worship this God you have to do so over my dead body. When we become a

Christian we have to decide whom we love the most. What if you are the first person in your family to become a Christian? Your testimony in front of your loved ones is very important. You have a mission to prove to your family members that being a Christian only makes you a better child, a better spouse, a better parent, a better student and a better employee. Through actions you show to others that being a Christian makes you a better person because you love God.

2. 準備要犧牲 Ready to Lose

Following Christ is a one-time decision with a life-long commitment. Jesus told us that we should be ready to love Him wholeheartedly. Next, Jesus taught us that we should be ready to lose everything in order to follow Him. He gave this second requirement to the crowd in **verse 27**: “And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” At that time when a convict was sentenced to death by crucifixion he had to carry a heavy wooden beam to the place where he would be executed. That beam would become part of the cross on which he would be nailed. Therefore, carrying one’s cross means to die. However, the Bible never tells Christians to commit suicide. Both “carry” and “follow” are in the present tense. Jesus is asking us to carry our cross continually for the rest of our lives as we follow Him. He added in **verse 33**: “...Any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.” We are to imitate Christ’s example of submitting to the will of the Father and prepare to lose everything for Him. Before we make a decision we often want to make sure that the benefit we will get is well worth the cost. A brother who serves in the military once told me that when he was deployed to a certain country the servicemen ate lobsters and steaks that were air-delivered to their base. I responded: “Goodness! A portion of our tax money goes to feed you guys with such delicacy?” But then I thought, serving as a soldier is not about eating lobsters and steaks. They should be ready to lose their lives at the front line to protect civilians. Similarly, receiving Christ is not only about going to heaven when we leave this world. It is also about serving Christ as His disciple in this life. God may not ask us to sell our cars, houses, and give all our money to Christian ministries. However, we have to give up our ownership on everything. Brothers and sisters: what have you lost when you decided to follow Christ? Is going out with friends, play online games or watching TV drama on Saturday night so important to you that you find it hard to go to bed earlier and get up in time for Sunday worship? If you have come to our church for some time now, are you involved in any ministry? Do you sit there and wait for others to serve you or do you actively look for opportunity to serve people? To the parents among us: do you see your children as a safeguard for your retirement, or are you preparing them to serve the Lord no matter what career path He has prepared for them? If you understand that what you have is from the Lord then you will not be reluctant when God wants to use it for His purposes.

CONCLUSION

Jesus then used illustrations of building a house, going to war and useless salt to strengthen His argument that one has to be ready to pay the price to follow Him. Following Christ is a one-time decision with a life-long commitment. Brothers and sisters: are you walking alongside with Christ, or are you following Him? Salvation is free, but it is also priceless. Jesus willingly paid the price on the cross to redeem us from sin. He is inviting us to imitate after Him and pay the price to follow Him. It is a continuous learning process. No one can do it perfectly on their own. But if we are willing to submit ourselves to the Lord, He will enable us.