

*25Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, 26“Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. 27Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 28For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? 29Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, 30saying, ‘This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.’ 31Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. 33So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.*

They killed Jesus. The crowds, the soldiers, the religious leaders all agreed that Jesus must die. They killed Jesus.

Sometimes we Christians have pretended that they killed Jesus because they were so utterly wicked. We have pretended that it was not people like us that killed him, but evil ones. Sometimes that has been all the excuse needed for Christians to hate Jews, and harm Jews. But I want to assure you, the people who killed Jesus were not more evil than I am. They were simply afraid.

Jesus wanted to change people. Now I don't mind if Jesus wants to change you. But I don't like it when Jesus wants to change me. I want him to approve of me, bless me, protect me, and let me live just the way I want to live. But I don't like it when Jesus wants to change me.

Put yourself in the large crowds that were following him. Why are we there? It is exciting. Like being part of the throng heading for the stadium when the Browns are heading for the playoffs. Everyone is upbeat, full of hopes and dreams. Jesus has been healing, Jesus has been telling stories that bring God close to us. Stories that make us think new thoughts. Jesus even blessed a great feast for all of us, a free feast from a few fish, a couple of loaves. Yes, this is exciting.

But then Jesus turns and says to us, "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes and even life itself, cannot be my disciples. None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions."

I hear these words and I know how completely Jesus wants to change me. Hate wife and children? Hate even life itself? Give up all my possessions?

Jesus is attacking the very foundation stones of my life. Family, life and health, material blessing. The reason I am part of this crowd is that I think my life will be better following Jesus. I bring my family here that there might be peace in our home, love and peace in our marriage, that we might know God's blessing.

And possessions. I know that possessions could enslave me, but I also know God is the one who provides material goods for our blessing. We thank God that he has given daily bread and not left us like the Somolians. These are very hard words of Jesus. "None of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions."

"Which of you," says Jesus, "intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand. If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. "

What will be the cost of following Jesus? Jesus is saying to the large crowd, and to you and me that the cost may be the very things we hold most dear. Family, possessions, even life itself. Was it these words that caused the crowds to return home, and follow no more?

Most of us would rather change gods than change ourselves. The large crowds chose family and life and possessions. Even the disciples made that choice, running, hiding, returning to their fishing boats, and their families when the soldiers arrested Jesus.

Only one remained true - Jesus himself. The crowds who did not like his words cried for his crucifixion. I cry for his crucifixion when he tells me to let go of family and possessions and life. Better that Jesus and his word in my heart should die than I should die.

Better starving children in Africa should die than my children not have every opportunity and a sure tomorrow.

Better I should tell all of you that there is no need for you to change so that you will not go away and my life will be secure than that I should let your hear the words of Jesus.

Better that I should play golf and listen to my classical music than that I should sacrifice my happiness for others as Jesus did.

Only one remained true, and that was Jesus.

And we killed him for it because we do not want to change.

God has made Jesus death into our life. This is the greatest mystery that is. God has made Jesus death into our life. I cannot begin to understand why God would choose to give me life when I have shown myself only deserving of death - unworthy to be a disciple. Yet he has.

God raised Jesus from the dead and promised us that we will live forever with him through the death of Jesus. We who have loved our possessions more than we have loved God, we who have loved our own families more than we have loved God's family, we who have loved our fragile, failing flesh more than we have loved God's eternal and Holy Spirit, we are loved for all eternity in the dying of Jesus.

I do not understand this.

But we can believe this, receive and trust in Jesus forever.

Jesus said to count the cost, and once I do, I know that I cannot pay it.

But thanks be to God who gives us salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.