

Finding By Losing

Matthew 10:34–42

In Western countries like ours in which Christianity has had a great influence, not only in the past but in the present, becoming a Christian and being baptized does not cost much and it does not, for some, mean much. That's not the case everywhere.

Often in countries that are opposed to Christianity, baptism is the point at which a person is considered dead, no longer a part of the biological family. Interestingly, baptism in those instances carries a triple meaning: death with Christ, death to self and death to the previous way of life, and in their case their family.

Asian Access (or A2), a Christian missions agency in South Asia, listed a series of questions that church planters must ask new believers who are considering baptism. These are the seven questions asked to help determine a new convert's readiness to follow Christ:

1. Are you willing to leave home and lose the blessing of your father?
2. Are you willing to lose your job?
3. Are you willing to go to the village and those who persecute you, forgive them, and share the love of Christ with them?
4. Are you willing to give an offering to the Lord?
5. Are you willing to be beaten rather than deny your faith?
6. Are you willing to go to prison?
7. Are you willing to die for Jesus?

If the new convert answers yes to all of these questions, then church leaders invite that person to sign on the bottom of the paper that of their own free will they have decided to follow Jesus. But here's the risk: if a new convert signs the paper and is caught by the government, he or she will spend three years behind bars. The one

who did the evangelizing faces six years in prison. Following Jesus has a cost.

As Jesus finishes his teaching to his disciples here, there are no countries that are predominantly Christian yet. There aren't many Christians at all yet. But Jesus is reminding his disciples that, by following him, they will face conflict. They will face persecution. They will face challenges. They will lose things. But what they gain would be worth the loss.

Jesus told his followers that following him would have a great cost. It would divide parents and children. It would cost his followers everything they had. The kingdom of God matters more than even something as important as family.

We like to think of the Christian message as something safe. Christian radio stations advertise themselves as being safe for the whole family. We think of Jesus bringing peace. But Jesus tells us that his message will divide families. His message is not one that's just safe and comfortable. It's not a message that leaves us safe and comfortable, either.

In the Chronicles of Narnia books and movies, Jesus is represented by Aslan, a lion. When Mr. Beaver is explaining who Aslan is to the children who found their way to Narnia, Lucy asks if Aslan is "safe". Mr. Beaver responds, "Safe? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you." Jesus isn't always safe. Jesus isn't always comfortable. But Jesus is good. Jesus is the king. Jesus is our savior.

It is unfortunate that we are not hearing our Gospel lesson read in its original Greek language. For a bit of basic Greek grammar

would help us to understand that infinitive verb forms don't necessarily indicate purpose; they can also indicate result. In other words, Jesus is not saying that the purpose of his coming is to cause division in families, but that the inevitable result of his coming is that some families will be divided by the Gospel. Not all have faith to believe. In every family, there are those who hear the Gospel and believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior; and there are those who reject both the Messiah and his message. And so, we have a division. Christians do not seek division, but division occurs.

Did you know even Jesus had family trouble because of his faith? Even though they heard the angels' prophecies, his parents struggled to understand his mission and purpose. Jesus' own brothers thought he was crazy, and did not believe in him until after the resurrection. Later on, at his home church (synagogue), Jesus sadly said, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." If all of that happened to Jesus, then why do we think it wouldn't happen to us? So, what can we do?

First of all, pray for your unbelieving loved ones. God desires all people to be saved. That includes your family! So don't give up on them, and don't give up on God. In his *Confessions*, Augustine writes about how his mother, Monica, never stopped praying for him. Through tears and terrible years, she watched her son's rebellious, sinful life. And then one day God answered her prayer. Augustine heard a preacher whose words caught his attention, and then he stumbled upon the Scriptures, which changed his heart and transformed Church history forever. God answered Monica's prayers. Do not doubt that he will answer your prayers too!

Second, ask questions! Show genuine interest and concern for them. After all, people don't care what you know until they know that you

care! They also want to be seen as a person, not just an evangelism project.

Third, listen! God gave you two ears and only one mouth, so listen! You will get a lot further in life by listening to your loved ones' questions and concerns than you will be telling them they're wrong. Nobody likes to be corrected or told they're wrong—even if it's true. So, earn the right to be heard by first listening yourself.

Finally, discuss, don't debate. As I sometimes mention during premarital counseling, you don't want to win an argument and lose a relationship. You don't want to focus so much on getting a good zinging line in that you don't realize the hurt it might cause. Instead, discuss, keep the conversation going and open. The apostle Peter says that we should always be ready "to make a defense," or give a reason, "for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15).

You may experience real pain and loss when you take up your cross to follow Jesus. But not all is lost. In fact, it's precisely when you give up everything you love for the sake of Jesus that you gain the world, your soul, and a new family. And, by God's grace, your earthly family may even join you in that journey.

Jesus tells us that if we love our parents or children more than him, we're not worthy of him. But God shows his great love for us by sending his own Son Jesus to die for our sins and give us eternal life.

When we believe and are baptized into Christ's Body, the Church, we become part of a bigger family than we ever could have dreamed of. By right of our adoption in Baptism, we now have God as our loving, heavenly Father. Jesus becomes our Brother in the flesh. And every single believer throughout the world in every time and place becomes our brother or sister in Christ. Mothers, brothers, sisters—a heavenly

Father—and in the age to come, eternal life.
Even those who lose their families find a new
family within the church. It doesn't cure the
pain or loss, but it helps. What a wonderful
family we have in Jesus!

Pastor David Beagley
Memorial Lutheran Church and Student Center,
Ames, Iowa
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