

## INTRODUCTION

This is a joyful day in our church family. We shall witness the baptism of six brothers and sisters. Every time when I administer baptism I have to correct one misconception that even Christians may have – baptism cannot save a person. We are a Baptist Church and we see baptism as very important. However, it concerned me every time when I heard people say: “I was baptized in a certain year.” I mumbled in my heart: “Good! But do you remember when you were saved?” According to the Bible we are not saved by the water. We can only be saved by God’s grace. It is God who opens our heart, and give us faith in response to His calling. If baptism cannot save us, then what does the water do to us?” Baptism is an outward expression that a person has accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Most married people wear a wedding ring; even engaged ladies cannot wait to show off their engagement rings. A ring cannot make a married person. But a ring symbolizes an existing or future wedding. This little metal ornament sends a signal to others: “I’m unavailable. Don’t bother me!” Similarly, baptism indicates that a person belongs to Christ. Baptism is a command from the Lord to His followers. If a Christian says he/she submits to Christ then baptism is an obligation he/she needs to fulfill. You see, salvation is all about following God’s commands in our lives. Therefore, in case you wonder if there is a typo in our message title there isn’t. Christian life all begins with fellowship with Christ. Hopefully, the Webster Dictionary will consider including that word in the future.

## EXPLANATION

In the passage we read earlier Jesus gave a challenge to the crowd about the cost of discipleship. A disciple is a follower. Jesus outlined two important requirements for His followers: love the Lord and carry their own cross. 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.” That sounds offensive to us. Did Jesus ask us to cut off all our relationship with family members like a Buddhist monk? Also, did Jesus ask us to commit suicide? Of course not! The Bible tells us to love our parents. Jesus also said in the gospels that we have to love God and love others as ourselves. Jesus was telling us to reexamine our priorities in life. Very often, we may have conflict with non-believing family members after we become a Christian. They cannot understand why we donate hard-earned money to the church, or attend meetings while we can go shopping or fishing or being honest in our tax return or school exam. The pressure can come from the outside, but it can also come from the inside. If there is one person in the whole world whom we love the most it is ourselves. Why come to Sunday school and worship when you can sleep a little longer in Sunday morning? Why spend time reading the Bible when you can stream your favorite TV show or movie? Why be so diligent after your boss has left the office at 3 pm when your colleagues are all sipping coffee and chatting? Jesus asked us to think carefully. If we choose to follow Him then we must love Him more than anyone else. The second requirement is in **verse 27**: “And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” What does it mean to carry one’s cross? Contrary to what some people think a person’s cross is not something that creates burden in life. Some men think that their nagging wife is their cross. Some people think that food is their cross because they cannot resist

anything sweet. We all have some issues we have to deal with. But when Jesus mentioned “cross” He had something else in mind. To Jesus’ audience taking up one’s cross can only mean one thing – going to die. At that time, when a criminal was sentenced to die on the cross he had to carry a beam. That heavy piece of wood would become part of the cross on which he would be hanged. Once again, Jesus did not ask us to commit suicide. In Romans 12:1 which many of you should be familiar with, Paul urges us to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice for God. As Christ’s followers, we should be a piece of walking dead-meat. We live our lives for God’s glory. But at the same time we should die to ourselves – our sinful nature and all our selfish pursuit. You say: “That is impossible for me to do.” Welcome to God’s family! If you think you can live a Christian life by your own effort then you are still living for yourself. Following Christ is not a matter of “I can.” It is a matter of “I am willing.” I am willing to yield myself to the Lord and allow His mighty power to work in me. For example, before you became a believer you indulged in a certain sin. But now, by the power of God in you, you can walk away from the temptation.

Next, Jesus used two analogies to illustrate the need of careful consideration before we decide to follow Him. First, it is about calculating the cost before building a house. If a man realizes that he does not have the money to finish the job then he may as well cancel the plan. A building that only has a foundation is not a house. The final result is either a house or no house. The second analogy is about going to war. A king should first estimate if he has enough manpower to win a battle. If not, then it would be wiser to sign a peace treaty with his enemy. An unfinished house is a loss of money, but a lost battle can cost both properties and lives. The moral for both analogies is the same: don’t start if you don’t think that you can finish.

Finally, Jesus hit home with his concluding remarks in [verses 34 and 35](#): 34 “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? 35 It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. ‘He who has ears to hear, let him hear.’” In those days, the salt people used had a lot of impurities in it. When a salt gets wet and some of the minerals are washed away then the salt will lose its saltiness. A salt that is not salty is of no use. It is like a car without gas or a cell-phone without signal. Jesus was saying that there is no half-heart follower. Either a person is useful to God’s Kingdom or is useless in God’s eyes.

## CONCLUSION

Jesus was asking the crowd for a commitment to Him. Jesus sets the same standard for us. In this world merchandise can be returned for a refund, loyalty to a company depends on a paycheck and marriage looks more like a contract. But following Christ is a no-U-turn street. Salvation is not just about starting right, but it is also about finishing strong. It is not about what we can get from God, but what we can give to please Him. It is not just about accepting Christ as our Savior, but also following Him as Lord. On that day there were many people traveling along with Jesus. But Jesus was not asking for companion. He was looking for followers.