

Matthew 10:34-42

Fifty-six men signed the Declaration of Independence. Of these, five were captured by the British, branded as traitors, and tortured until they died. Twelve had their homes ransacked and burned. Two lost their sons serving in the Revolutionary Army. Another had two sons captured. Nine of the fifty-six fought and died in the Revolutionary War or from injuries incurred in it. These men were not professional soldiers. They were merchants, farmers, lawyers, and jurists. When they signed their name to the Declaration, they knew full well what awaited them. These men had courage, loyalty, and they were committed.

I read somewhere that well over half of Americans, as high as three-fourths, believe that Jesus is God, but only 18% are in church on any given Sunday. What does this tell us? A number of things, not the least of which is that believing is not the same thing as being committed.

Are you committed to Jesus? This is what He asks us in our text for today. He puts it this way: *“Whoever loves father or mother...son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”*

To sign our name on the document, as the fifty-six men did in 1776, is rather easy. And I suppose we can say that we did this on the day of our confirmation. We signed our commitment to Jesus and His church. But did we sign on the dotted line that day with ink or with blood?

The fifty-six signed with their blood. They did not love their own life more than they loved the cause to which they were committed. They did not love their families, their homes and possessions, more than they loved their cause. They were willing to give up everything, and many of them did.

What are you willing to give up for Jesus? Your time on Sunday mornings? Ten percent of your income? Some free time each day to spend in His Word and in prayer? An organization that doesn't demand commitment from its members is not worth being a part of. This is also true of Jesus' church. I think far too many church members have the idea that being a follower of Jesus is easy with few commitments on their part. And maybe we are all to blame for this. We want our church to grow so badly that we want to make it easy for people to join.

But it shouldn't be easy. Are we listening to Jesus' words in our text? If we are not committed to Him more than to anything else in life, including our own life and our loved ones, we have no business following Him. Did the Revolutionary Army want men who were half-way committed to defeating the British? They would have sent them home. If they were not prepared to die, they had no business following George Washington into battle.

You and I are in a battle, my friends. And the enemy we fight is more powerful than the British army; more cunning, more dangerous. Yet compared to other armies in our world today, it may well be that we in the church are the most pathetic army of them all. Our commitment level is pretty low, if it's even there at all. We hardly follow our Lord and General into battle, let alone listen to Him when He speaks to us. Our eyes are not focused on Jesus. Our hearts do not love

Him more than father and mother, son and daughter. We do not gladly carry our cross after Him, but we lay it down, putting our goals and desires first. We do not lose our life for His sake too well, but we are always living life to the fullest at the expense of following Christ.

Now there is something we should know about what Jesus says in our text for today. He is not telling us how to be His followers. He is not giving us a pre-battle speech to get us pumped up. He is not even trying to raise our commitment level. What Jesus is saying here is that we are all failures. He is not telling us what we should do as much as showing us what we are unable to do. We do not love Him more than everything and everyone else. This is the First Commandment, and we break it constantly. So, friends, the simple truth is that you and I are not worthy of Jesus; not by how we live and follow Him.

But listen to this good news. Luther puts it this way for us: "He is truly worthy...who has faith in these words, '*Given and shed for you for the remission of sins.*'" You do not love Jesus most of all, but Jesus loved you in this way. He lost His life for your sake. He carried His cross for you. He loved no one and nothing more than you. And you are worthy of Him for no other reason than that you confess your unworthiness and believe that He forgives you, and that here in His Sacrament He gives you this forgiveness.

"*I have not come,*" Jesus says, "*to bring peace to the earth...but a sword.*" There is no true peace in our world. But there is peace for your heart. Jesus came to bring peace to God's heart. And He did by His sufferings and death. God is at peace with you. His sword is no longer at your neck. Jesus felt its blade for you. The sword of God's anger pierced Him through. And now He has put His sword away. There is much anger and violence here on earth, but there is none within God toward you. Jesus saved you from that. Jesus signed His name in blood for you. And that blood was sprinkled on you in your baptism. You are marked as one for whom Christ died and rose again. You stand before God forgiven of all your sins.

And you come to His altar in this way; not fearfully, but confidently. There is no sword here in the Sacrament. There is only mercy and peace. Here is Christ receiving you, calling you worthy of His body and blood, not because you are without sin, but because you are sinful and you confess this truth; but you desire Christ and His forgiveness for you. And it's yours.

"*Whoever finds his life,*" says Jesus, "*will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*" The Gospel finds you where you are in life. Jesus, who is the Gospel, invites you to lose your life in Him because He has another life for you: His own. In Christ you lose your life of sin and regrets; your life of guilt; your life of lack of commitment. And He gives you a life that is beautiful; a life lived at peace with God; a life full of love for God and for others; a life filled with hope; a life of commitment to Jesus and His church. This is not a perfect life; but it is the forgiven life. And it's your life. The life you have now and forever in Christ. Amen.