

If the leader of a nation were to say things that were outrageous, and even offensive, his advisors might quickly attempt to do damage control by telling the public that he didn't mean what he said; he really meant to say something else.

Well, Jesus' pastors are not His advisors. And so, it is not for me to attempt to do damage control this morning by telling you that Jesus did not mean what He says here in our text. Yes, these are outrageous, even offensive words. Hating those in our own families. Hating our own lives. Renouncing all that we have. These words can make us wince at the very least. It is not for me to put words into Jesus' mouth. But it is for me to preach His words faithfully.

His words here are Law and not Gospel. The purpose of the Law is not to make us feel good about ourselves, but to show us who and what we really are; to drive us, not to despair, but to repentance, so that the good news of Jesus can heal us, restore us, give us joy, comfort, and hope.

I knew a pastor who struggled, as we all do, with Jesus' words in our text. It was flat out impossible for him to hate his wife and children. He couldn't do it. And so, he preached these words of Jesus from the pulpit, yet without truly understanding them. Until one day when he finally did understand them. It was the day he died. He was laying in his hospital bed, his wife sitting next to him holding his hand. And then, with his last bit of strength, he took her hand and laid it off to the side, and then he died.

That man was my father. He loved his wife and children as Jesus commanded him to in many places of Scripture. But his family members were just that, family, and not his Lord and Savior. If his wife, my mother, was his Savior, he could have renounced Jesus and clung to her. He trusted that he would see her, and his children, in heaven. And when he was being taken to heaven, he did what he had never done before, abandoning his loved ones here.

That is what Jesus' word is speaking of in our text. *Miseo* in the Greek. The word *hate*. To hate our family is not to harbor ill will in our hearts toward them, but to abandon them, not physically, but spiritually in this way – accepting the fact that they cannot take us to heaven. Nor can we ourselves, nor anything that we have. And so, we hate, we abandon even ourselves and all that we have. We renounce everything here on earth declaring that we have no Savior except for Jesus.

But we may never truly understand these things until we are laying upon our death bed, and then we see clearly that there is only one to whom we can truly cling – the one who never abandons us, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

But until that day we struggle with Jesus' words in our text. And maybe it's because we don't like being told that we cannot do something. And right here, in black and white, Jesus tells us that we cannot be His disciples. Three times in our text He says that we cannot be His disciples because we do not have what it takes. We cannot complete the tower that we start to build. We cannot defeat the king with our smaller army. And we cannot hate and abandon our loved ones

and ourselves, nor can we renounce all that we have and take up our cross and follow Jesus. Jesus does not say that we can, but we cannot be His disciples.

His words here are Law, not Gospel. We want to hear the Gospel. But we will abandon the Gospel. We will lay it aside and not cling to it unless we first lay aside and abandon everything and everyone else.

So, Jesus says that you and I cannot be His disciples. That's the bad news. That is the truth of who and what we are. But here is the good news. You are Jesus' disciple. You are one who calls Him Lord and Savior.

But how? It's not something you did. No, "*you cannot be My disciples,*" He tells us. And yet you are. So, why are you Jesus' disciple?

That's like asking salt, "Why are you salt?" "I don't know," it would say, "I just am." You don't tell salt to become salt. You don't teach it to become salt. It's either salt or it's not. There is no in between. And don't say, "What about Mrs. Dash?"

Salt is salt because there is a bond between sodium and chloride. That's why it's salt. And that's why you are Jesus' disciple. In your baptism He bonded you to Himself. The action was His, not yours. He is the one who suffered, died on the cross, and rose again for you. Baptism is His work, not your work. You are who you are, Jesus' disciple, the salt of the earth, because He out of pure grace has done this for you.

Oh, you can break that bond. And many do. This is why Jesus warns us that salt is worthless when it has lost its taste. Jesus will never abandon you. But you can abandon Him. You can cling too tightly to what you have here – your money and possessions, yourself, your family. All these can come between you and Jesus and break the bond with Him. Yes, this is Law. And Jesus warns us with it because of His love for you.

And friend, no matter how many times you have abandoned Jesus, His love for you never fails. And more, your baptism never fails. No matter how often you have left your baptism into Christ, your baptism will never leave you. There is always, in your baptism, forgiveness for your sins. There is always grace and mercy there for you. Your baptism is not law; it's Gospel.

It is God's gracious work, not just on the day you were baptized, but day after day, as He works to return you to your baptism, to restore your bond with Jesus. That's why He brought you here today. To re-establish that bond with Him. To assure you that He truly loves you, and that He has forgiven you. And He has. Everyone of you. Amen.