

Some Hard Sayings of Jesus

MANY sayings of Jesus are well known and well loved, but some of them are more challenging and harder to understand. This is deliberate. Jesus did not want his teaching to become simply a book of rules, he wants us to think for ourselves. If we sincerely try to grasp his teaching, praying for guidance, then understanding will come. Maybe not instantly as in a flash of light, but gradually over a period of time (Luke 11:9).

Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me (Mark 8:34).

We often hear words like “We all have our cross to bear”, usually about someone who has suffered problems in life. This is not what Jesus meant. Those burdens, heavy as they may be, are not burdens which we willingly take up. They happen to us and we have to cope with them.

But here Jesus is talking about ‘self-sacrifice’, about choosing to deny ourselves something we have cherished, and doing this for him. It means that we need to check our priorities. For example, we may find that enthusiasm for a hobby takes up our time when we could be doing some kindness or other work for Jesus. The call is to ‘take up our cross’ – to be prepared to sacrifice our own inclinations and to follow God’s will, just as Jesus himself did.

Whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also (Matthew 5:39).

Jesus practised what he preached; he was no hypocrite and his actions illustrate his message. For much of the time when Jesus stood on trial for his life he kept silent (Luke 23:9–11; 1 Peter 2:21–24). However, when being questioned by the high priest an officer gave him a tremendous swipe across his face. While still submissive (Isaiah 53:7), Jesus spoke to the man. He did not escalate the situation by asking him to hit his other cheek, but said “*If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike me?*” (John 18:23).

We should never seek revenge, that is not the Christian response. Instead we should ‘turn the other cheek’. It may be necessary to speak firmly about a matter, in a Christ-like way, but the urge to seek revenge should have no place in our thinking (Romans 12:17–21).

Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you (Matthew 5:44).

Jesus certainly did this! An example is the relationship between Jesus and Judas Iscariot. Jesus knew from the outset that Judas was stealing from the shared money and that that he would betray him. On one



If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple (Luke 14:26).

Does Jesus really want us to hate those closest to us? Not literally – this would contradict his teaching about love. Jesus was saying that our desire to serve him should be greater than our desire to please relatives and even ourselves. He certainly did this.

Joseph and Mary had quite a large family after the birth of Jesus. His brothers and sisters were very sceptical of Jesus' claims to be the Son of God (John 7:1–5). They did their best to silence him, saying that he was mad (Mark 3:21). But Jesus refused to be silenced; he had been sent to preach the Gospel and he would not be deterred.

The brothers persuaded Mary to join them in seeking to physically remove Jesus for his own safety. Jesus responded, “Who is my mother or my brothers?... whoever does the will of God is my brother and my sister and mother” (Mark 3:33–35).

How heart-rending for Mary! But we see here an example of Jesus putting his supreme love for God before his love for his mother and even before his care for himself.

We do well to read Jesus' words and to think carefully about what he meant. After all, Jesus said “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63).

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occasion a valuable gift had been given to Jesus personally and Judas commented that it could have been sold and the proceeds given to the poor. The inspired disciple John, writing some years later, commented “*This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it*” (John 12:4–6). Jesus knew all about it yet refrained from exposing Judas.

Even in the Upper Room, hours before the crucifixion, when Jesus humbly washed the disciples' feet, he showed no discrimination and treated Judas equally. He never said a bad word about Judas. What an incredible example of self-control!

Later, when arrested, Jesus healed a man injured by one of the disciples who tried to defend him (Luke 22:49–51). And Jesus went on to die for us while we were ‘enemies of God’ (Colossians 1:21) showing the greatest love ever (John 15:13).