

What Did Jesus Mean?

Digging deep into Jesus' teachings.



What Did Jesus Mean? Hard Sayings of Jesus

September 30, 2025
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Introduction

It is said of Jesus: *He comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable*. This was true for his original audience and continues to be so for us today.

The Tone-Deaf Disciples

Let's look first at the difficulty Jesus had in explaining to his disciples what was going to happen—why he had come to earth:

They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, ³¹because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." ³²But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it (Mark 9:30 – 32).

Luke records the same event which came after the transfiguration "when everyone was marveling at all Jesus did.

"Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men." ⁴⁵But they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it (Luke 9:44-45).

Jesus begins by saying "Listen carefully to what I am going to tell you." What might they be expecting to hear from Jesus at this point?

Luke says that this truth of what was going to happen to Jesus was hidden from them. Was it hidden because they just couldn't get it, or was it hidden on purpose by Jesus?

Why couldn't they get it at that time?

Have you ever thought about how much you may be blinded to a truth from Jesus?

For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known (1 Corinthians 13:12:).

God has reasons, based on his infinite wisdom, which he does not always choose to reveal to us.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. ⁹"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Jesus is trying to prepare the disciples for what is to come but they just couldn't hear it—not yet anyway. How often do you and I miss what God is trying to say to us because we are holding fast to our own preconceived ideas of who God is and what God will do? We simply want God to bless our plans—make them work, sooner rather than later.

If the disciples would have had their way, Jesus would have been made an earthly king, never gone to the

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cross—and all mankind including you and me would have been destined to hell. Can you think of times in your life when if God had done what you wanted him to do—if your plan had prevailed—you'd be in a big mess right now? Or maybe you're in a predicament now because you did it your way, not God's way.

Think of what the disciples were having to grapple with—a complete attitudinal change in their understanding of Messiah—who he would be and what he would do. They cannot take in the fact that Jesus will be betrayed – “delivered into the hands of men.” Why would anyone betray him when he is doing so much good, and is at the height of his powers and so popular?

Were they afraid to ask him because they didn't want to be reproached for their dullness and slow of learning? After all, Jesus had rebuked Peter with sharpness and severity:

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. ²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” ²³ Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns” (Matthew 16:21-23).

But afterwards they remembered. This is what the angel told them when they were at the empty tomb:

“He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’” ⁸ Then they remembered his words (Luke 24:6-8).

It was not until after the resurrection that the disciples began to “get it.”

At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that these things had been done to him (John 12:16).

Hard Sayings of Jesus

We read in John 6:60, after Jesus has preached a tough sermon, that his disciples said: “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”

First Hard Saying

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: ²⁶ “If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. ²⁷ And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

²⁸ “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? ²⁹ For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, ³⁰ saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.’

³¹ “Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³² If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³ In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.” (Luke 14:25-33).

Jesus made it clear that following him was the narrow road, and a narrow road is more difficult to navigate than a big broad road. But the narrow road leads to life – life eternal.

The Christian faith is not a low-cost, low-risk endeavor. Large crowds did not impress Jesus, as they do us. So, he turned to this large crowd and laid it out for them—to follow me will cost you.

Does Jesus really call us to hate our biological families and our very lives? What is Jesus telling us?

Jesus is using hyperbolic language here as he does frequently in his teachings, such as:

“If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire.”⁹ And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell” (Matthew 18:8-9).

This passage in Luke has a parallel passage in Matthew:

“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37).

Salvation is both absolutely free and yet it costs you. A person who claims to be a believer but isn't seeking to grow in obedience, is more a fan than a follower.

They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him (Titus 1:16a).

Second Hard Saying

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” (Matthew 7:21-23).

In this passage Jesus presents the two types of people who will come to him on “that day,” meaning the last day, the day of judgment, the great day which will be terrible to some and joyful to others. All will be seeking to enter the kingdom of heaven, but some will be turned away and will react in utter confusion and disappointment as what they thought was their “ticket” to heaven turns out to be worthless.

If these do not belong to God and never did, how do we explain their ability to persuade and deceive so many?

Jesus warns us to be on guard against deception as the end times draw near.

For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect (Matthew 24:24).

Third Hard Saying

Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.”

²⁰ Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”²¹ Another disciple said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

²² But Jesus told him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead” (Matthew 8:19-22).

Scribes were experts of the Mosaic Law. This unnamed scribe addresses Jesus as Teacher and expresses enthusiasm to follow him. Jesus tells the scribe that to follow him wherever he goes, he will have to be willing to give up his home—to leave his identity and home behind.

The second unnamed man is clearly a disciple who calls Jesus *Lord*. It was likely this disciple was not asking permission for a short leave to attend a funeral but was saying he needed to provide for his elderly father until he passed. So, it could be months or years.

Conclusion

Jesus encroaches, invades, and infringes on our comfort zones. But following Jesus is the greatest calling any of us could have. It is the narrow road that leads to life—abundant life now and eternal life afterwards.