

## Introduction to the *Hard Sayings* of Jesus & Paul

### Many Who Heard Jesus' Teachings Firsthand Found Them "Hard" and Said So.

#### John 6:53-60,66

So Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. <sup>54</sup> But anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise that person at the last day. <sup>55</sup> For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. <sup>56</sup> Anyone who eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. <sup>57</sup> I live because of the living Father who sent me; in the same way, anyone who feeds on me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup> I am the true bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will not die as your ancestors did (even though they ate the manna) but will live forever."<sup>59</sup> He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. <sup>60</sup> **Many of his disciples said, "This is very hard to understand. How can anyone accept it?" At this point many of his disciples turned away and deserted him.**

#### Matthew 19:23-25

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is very hard for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. <sup>24</sup> I'll say it again—it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!" <sup>25</sup> **The disciples were astounded. "Then who in the world can be saved?" they asked.**

#### Matthew 13:10

His disciples came and asked him, **"Why do you use parables when you talk to the people?"**

#### John 16:39-31

Then his disciples said, "At last you are speaking plainly and not figuratively."<sup>30</sup> Now we understand that you know everything, and there's no need to question you. From this we believe that you came from God."<sup>31</sup> **Jesus asked, "Do you finally believe?"**

- Nicodemus (John 3)
- Peter's Rebuke (Matthew 16)
- John the Baptist (Matthew 11)

### Modern Believers Also Find Them Difficult, but Often Don't Say So.

It is all too easy to believe in a Jesus who is largely a construction of our own imagination - an inoffensive person whom no one would really trouble to crucify. But the Jesus whom we meet in the Gospels, far from being an inoffensive person, gave offence right and left. Even his loyal followers found him, at times, thoroughly disconcerting. He upset all established notions of religious propriety. He spoke of God in terms of intimacy which sounded like blasphemy. He seemed to enjoy the most questionable company. He set out with open eyes on a road which, in the view of 'sensible' people, was bound to lead to disaster. But in those who were not put off by him he created a passionate love and allegiance which death could not destroy. They knew that in him they had found the way of acceptance, peace of conscience, life that was life indeed. More than that: in him they came to know God himself in a new way; here was the life of God being lived out in a real human life, and communicating itself through him to them. And there are many people today who meet Jesus, not in Galilee and Judaea but in the gospel record, and become similarly aware of his powerful attractiveness, entering into the same experience as those who made a positive response.

-- F. F. Bruce

## What's So Hard?

### Jesus Made His Listeners Think

- Difficult, uncomfortable, and challenges traditions, preconceptions, and prejudices.

### Word & Spirit

#### John 3:9-10, 12

The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit...<sup>10</sup> Jesus replied, "You are a respected Jewish teacher, and yet you don't understand these things? ...But if you don't believe me when I tell you about earthly things, how can you possibly believe if I tell you about heavenly things?"

### Requirement of Valuing Truth and Diligence to Find It

#### Matthew 13:43-46

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field."<sup>45</sup> "Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls."<sup>46</sup> When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it!

#### Matthew 7:7-8

"Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you."<sup>8</sup> **For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.**

### Modern Readers Separated by 2,000 Years of Language and Cultural Barriers.

- Translations Aramaic – Greek – Latin – Modern Languages
- Massive differences between Eastern and Western paradigms of thought

### The Kingdom Came to Kill Self

- *"Jesus—who comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable."*
- *Mark Twain said the parts of the Bible that bothered him were not the parts he did not understand, but the parts that he did.*
  - **Hard to Understand or Hard to Accept?**

#### John 8:31-32, 37, 43, 47

<sup>31</sup> Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings."<sup>32</sup> And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." ...I realize that you are descendants of Abraham. And yet some of you are trying to kill me because there's no room in your hearts for my message...<sup>43</sup> Why can't you understand what I am saying? It's because you can't even hear me...<sup>47</sup> Anyone who belongs to God listens gladly to the words of God. But you don't listen because you don't belong to God."

## What Can I Do?

1. Be Open to Your Traditions, Preconceptions, and Prejudices Being Challenged.
2. Ask the Holy Spirit for Understanding.
3. Relentlessly Search and Dig for Kingdom Truth and the Knowledge of God.
4. Learn About Differences Linguistically and Culturally That Affect Your Understanding.
5. Humble Yourself, and Allow Jesus' Words Supremacy in Your Life.