

## Nov 8

### Hard Sayings

Matthew 5:27-30, Luke 14:25-27

Earlier in this series of perplexing scriptures we always had Jesus as our trump card. We could say that the Old Testament might say whatever, but Jesus says... This gave us a lot of latitude for ignoring some of those challenging scriptures saying we have evolved in our understandings of faith. But here we have two hard sayings of Jesus about hating parents and cutting off offending parts of our body. There are many more equally as challenging. What do we do with them? They are in our Bible; they are used against us by those who want a reason to tear down our faith. What do we do with these sayings other than ignore them?

The first thing seems simple enough. Don't take them literally. We should never tell our mother, spouse, child that we hate them. We should not encourage people to tear out their eyes or lop off parts of their body. Yet, over time some have taken these words quite literally. There have been those who, out of faith, felt the need to totally reject family in brutal ways. There have even been cases where people have practiced self-mutilation in the name of faith.

We need to see that Jesus used exaggeration and metaphor to get his point across. In this scripture we have Jesus saying if you don't hate mother or father you cannot be a disciple. Yet at the end of his life, seeing his own mother standing at the foot of the cross, he gives her into the love and care of his disciples. That is not the actions of one who hates his mother! Much of Jesus' teaching was metaphorical. We clearly see it in the parable where he says before taking the speck out of a brother's eye you should remove the plank that is in your own. We get he is exaggerating! Yet some other times we get stuck trying to figure out how to literally live out some of his injunctions that were never intended to be treated that way. Or we try to defend them to others who use them as examples of the extremes of our faith. We will talk in a moment about how to use them for help today but for now understand that exaggeration and metaphor were how Jesus taught.

Second it is sometimes hard for us to clearly know what Jesus was saying, considering the complexities of language translation and cultural differences and the length of time between Jesus saying something and it being written down. All of this means that when something we read in the Bible doesn't seem to fit well with the greater messages of Jesus we need to pause and reflect. We need to understand that we might not know the context of a message. We don't live in Palestine 2000 years ago under Roman occupation. We don't understand and grasp all the nuances of things going on in Jesus' messages. Also, Jesus spoke in Aramaic, which was translated into Greek and written down and translated into English. It is so easy to see how some of the meaning of Jesus words could be lost or changed in the process. And there was no camera or tape recorder recording the event so we have to rely upon memories and those too are fallible. All of this is to help us see that when we come across something like these hard sayings of Jesus we need to step back and be a bit skeptical.

Even though I have been spending time up until now discrediting, at least in part, some of these hard sayings I don't want you to ignore them because they make you uncomfortable. Let's see what Jesus may have been saying to his listeners and to us.

With the passage from Matthew we get so caught up in why we should lop off parts of our body to be faithful, we never ask what is behind the exaggerations. Jesus understands that we all are tempted by things and events. He also knows that the more we place temptations in our path the easier it is to sin. To bring it to modern days, if you are dealing with weight issues and you love ice cream it is probably not a good idea to go buy a couple of gallons of your favorite ice cream and stick them in the freezer so you can prove to yourself that you are strong and can resist the temptation to have a bowl. Or if you have a problem controlling your spending it is probably not a good idea to go shopping with a credit card with a huge limit telling yourself that you can resist using it. Jesus would say, cut ice cream out of your shopping list and don't bring it home. It is much easier to say no when to say yes means, putting on your shoes, finding your car keys, driving to the store and buying it. Before you do all of this you will probably convince yourself that you really don't need that high calorie dessert. Jesus would also say cut out charge cards all together and live on a cash only basis for a

while. It makes it much harder to indulge in that splurge purchase because it would mean going to the bank and drawing out the money before you can have it.

We all know the things or events that tempt us. They are different for each of us. Jesus is asking us to do what we can to eliminate those temptations, or triggers, from our life. Sometimes to do this means a radical readjustment of our lives but he said it is better to do this than to continue to fall into that particular sin and blame the external triggers instead of being accountable.

What do we glean from the passage in Luke that talks about hating parents as a proof of discipleship? Here is where a concordance is helpful. This same passage is found in Matthew and he remembered it a different way. Instead of hating parents Matthew says whoever loves parents and family more than me... That changes things, doesn't it? We can understand when our love for family becomes problematic. We talk about how love is blind. We see this, at times, when a young person is arrested for crime. You have the mother come on talking about what a good boy or girl this person is. They talk about what a good and upstanding citizen they are. They can't imagine them ever doing the thing they are arrested for. Often right afterwards you have the reporter come back on detailing a long list of crimes for which they have been arrested, the accounts of witnesses that make it clear that they are guilty and we think a mother's love is blind.

Hearing it this way we can begin to think about times where our love for family or friends has made us less than faithful. We have not spoken about something because we didn't want to hurt their feelings. We have done something or not done something to fit in because we didn't want to be seen as a problem. Love of family has decreased our love of God.

So what about Luke's version about hating family? It is a little more challenging. Now there is probably the person in our extended family that we would like permission to heap all of our bile and animosity upon. But that isn't what Jesus was talking about. Jesus often talked about the cost of discipleship. He ends this passage by talking about picking up your cross. In his day, responsibility to the family was a big deal. You were

obligated to do certain things if you were the oldest. Think about the man who wanted to follow Jesus but said, "First let me go and bury my father." You think that is an honorable request. Jesus says no, follow now. Why, because it was more likely being said, I will follow you when my familial obligations to my father are ended at his death. That could be days or years from now. To turn away from those responsibilities and follow Jesus would mean that many would say the man hated his father. To place discipleship first was a hard cross to carry. Family would not necessarily understand. You would be seen as uncaring. Jesus wants us to think about the cost of discipleship. Are we ready, to use another analogy, to put our hand to the plow and look forward only and not to the sides and behind us? Are we willing to pick up a cross?

It's a fine balance when you try to figure out some of these difficult teachings of Jesus. We would like to ignore them but we can't. We want to just discount them as being incorrect translations or hyperbole, but we can't. Jesus calls upon us to wrestle with them, to be confronted by their truths and figure out how we can learn from them and grow with them.