
JESUS' LESSER KNOWN WORDS

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MATTHEW 5-7

In our sound-bite world of flashing images and instant access, it can be difficult to see the whole picture—to find unifying themes and understandings about life and our faith. Our attention keeps getting dragged away to prominent events (like the death of the Pope), poster-child questions (*should the feeding tube be pulled?*), and everyday up's and down's (as in the stock market). Emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually, life is a giant maze with more twists and turns than we can keep track of in our heart and mind.

No wonder we have a hard time remembering some of Jesus' lesser-known words—ones that don't often get quoted, or the many sentences of context surrounding His famous one-liners. For instance, when most people think about the “Sermon on the Mount,” they (vaguely) remember five or six verses that begin with, “*Blessed are the poor in Spirit,*” and end with “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God*” (Matthew 5:3-9). They probably do not recall verse 11:

“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.” ~Matthew 5:11

And most would be surprised to learn that His sermon went on for another 98 verses, ending with Matthew's comment that “*when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority [expertise], and not as their scribes*” (Matthew 7:28-29).

In other words, Jesus really knew what He was talking about, and though such statements, as the one above, are somewhat jarring because they break in on our rose-colored picture of life, they actually bring lots of order and sense to the life we truly experience. Instead of hoping (in vain) that no one will give us a hard time because of our belief in Jesus, we can expect ridicule—not as a scary, surprising development, but as an affirmation that we truly are linked with Jesus. Getting mocked or penalized as believers isn't about us; it's about Him.

Even we who believe in and trust Jesus as our Savior, the One who has forgiven our (many) sins, will find His *other* words startling! Usually they are exacting, and point directly to specific actions—what we should or should not do. It's tempting to dismiss them, or pass over them quickly. At least, that's what often happens to me.

As we begin to examine a couple of Jesus' lesser-known sermons, I'd like to suggest a few guidelines for understanding what we read in the Bible, especially in the Gospels. To glean all that we can from any passage in the Bible that seems to bump into our sensibilities, remember:

1. Begin with the **belief** that the words are true, and let that truth sort through your thoughts/experiences—not the other way around!
2. Pay attention to the **context**—what is happening or being said prior to the passage you're reading.
3. Don't forget the **details**—often they hold the key to understanding a bigger picture.
4. Remember Acts 20:32—everything in the Bible is designed to **build you up** and to increase your **spiritual inheritance**.
5. Spend a little time **considering** and **meditating** on what you read—sometimes the meaning and implication for you won't become clear right away.
6. Always interpret a passage in light of **what you already know to be true** about God's kindness, love, and gentle graciousness toward you.
7. Stay **humble**—God knows way better than you do...about everything.

JOHN 6:26-63

Few concepts in the Bible are more startling and mind-boggling than Jesus' equality with God—that they are One (John 10:30)—that having seen Jesus; we have seen the Father (John 14:7-11)—the Father and the Son are in one another (John 10:38). Because our natural world is so oriented toward spatial perspectives, we have a hard time imagining anything being in two places simultaneously: *How can God be in Heaven and on Earth at the same time? How can Jesus and the Father be the same, and yet distinct?*

But the logical difficulties concerning Jesus' equality with the Father were NOT the biggest stumbling point for the religious Jews; they were troubled by the blasphemous implications of any human being who claimed to be a *direct* descendant of God—calling God His Father. The Jewish

religious establishment traced their ancestry back to Moses, and liked to think of themselves as sons of the prophets. It was their way of saying, “We follow in the footsteps of our spiritual ancestors, and whatever was true of Moses or the prophets in their day is true of us in our day!”

Consequently, when Jesus identified God (not just Moses) as His Father, the religious leaders' authority was threatened by being outranked. Their religion was based, to a large degree, on a legalistic adherence to the Law and on man-made ideas and traditions, which they claimed came from Moses or the prophets. Jesus kept challenging those ideas and traditions with the word of God. For instance, on a Sabbath day, Jesus healed a sick man. The religious people strictly followed the law that no work was to be done on the Sabbath, so they concluded that Jesus had committed a sin by working (performing a healing)!

His response was to point out that they circumcised infants on the Sabbath—in order to obey another law. How backwards it is to be upset when a whole person is healed according to the promise of God, and not to be angry when a simple act is performed to identify a child as a son of promise. Jesus confronted them by saying, “*Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment*” (John 7:24). It is always a danger for religion to focus too much on a law, rather than on the law's intent to keep us pointed toward the Lord.

Not only did Jesus' claim outrank that of the religious leaders,' it also struck them as utterly impossible. In their theology, no one could communicate directly with God except Moses, who had spoken with Him “*face to face*” (Exodus 33:11). This was the primary reason why the religious establishment rejected Jesus—and why the theme appears over and over throughout the New Testament:

“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.” ~Hebrews 1:1-3a

Being the *Son of God* would give Jesus equal standing with God, and would make Jesus' words as good as the Father's. Instead of a religion based on people's ability to be perfect and in *their* own works, Jesus encouraged people to believe in the Father's desire to make a new covenant with them. This way to God would be open to everyone who believed—not just to those who had managed to obey all the Law. Here was a new and living way for lost and broken people (sinners) to be reunited with God.

Consequently, throughout the Gospels, Jesus uses Old Testament episodes and quotations to make Himself more understandable to the Jewish worldview and to show that His message is the same

one that His Father had been trying to communicate since before Moses' time. Over and over again, He claims that His words are NOT His alone, but they come directly from God the Father.

Actually, that is the crunch-point for our post-modern world, too. It isn't just the Jewish establishment 2000 years ago that is threatened by Jesus' claim to speak directly for God. People today have their own religion and their own sense of how God thinks. When the words of Jesus contradict such manmade ideology, people are challenged just as the Jews were long, long ago. Some things do not change with time...

LUKE 1-2

The Gospel of Luke provides us with the most detailed and chronological account of Jesus' life and words; Luke's goal was to write out, in consecutive order, the exact truth about the things [we] have been taught.

"...Just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in consecutive order..." ~Luke 1:2-3

He offers us interesting particulars that juxtapose (place side-by-side in meaningful connection) well-known statements and events with frequently overlooked sayings and ~doings of Jesus. On Mothers' Day it seems appropriate to take a closer look at an episode when Jesus makes statements about His earthly mother, Mary:

"While Jesus was saying these things, one of the women in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, 'Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts at which You nursed.' But He said, 'On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it.'" ~Luke 11:27-28

They aren't, exactly, Mothers' Day words. In fact, they can seem to be a bit unkind or dismissive—as though Jesus does not appreciate or celebrate the place Mary had in His life. And His words about His mother do not convey any of the religious overtones that have come to be associated with Mary in certain church circles.

Let's rehearse the miraculous conception of Christ (not to be confused with the *"Immaculate Conception,"* a doctrine adopted by the Catholic church in the mid-1800's claiming that Mary, herself, was untouched by "original sin" and lived a sin-free life). God, who called the entire world into being, simply by speaking, brought His Son into our physical realm by overshadowing Mary, and placing His essence in her womb so that the life therein would be both wholly human and wholly God.

The angel addressed Mary as “*favored one*,” meaning that God was gracing her, not that she was superior to all other young ladies. In fact, when the angel called her *favored one*, she was puzzled by and uncomfortable with the idea that she was somehow *special* (Luke 1:29). Knowing nothing was impossible with God, she accepted that a child could be born to her without the seed of man being planted in her. She remained a virgin until after Jesus’ birth, and she raised Him, along with His brothers and sisters; sometime along the way becoming a widow, until Jesus was around 30 years old (when He began His public ministry).

Jesus loved her deeply, and while He was dying on the Cross, He asked one of His best friends to adopt her as his mother, and to take care of her in her later years—the very thing that a good son would do for his mother. Mary was a remarkable woman who, like all good mothers, was accustomed to telling her child what to do (remember the episode when she told Jesus to get more wine at the wedding?). In every way, Mary was a great mother to Jesus: she was pierced by every rejection her Son experienced; she was with Him to the very end and after His death; she gathered along with 120 of His followers in the upper room on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus “*continued in subjection to [Mary and Joseph]; and His mother treasured all things (said about Him) in her heart*” (Luke 2:51).

Theirs was a most extraordinary relationship. But in the word of God, she is *not* revealed as an icon or portrayed as anything more than a sincere follower of her Messiah. She has no exceptional spiritual powers, no additional claims on her Son’s life, and no designated role in Heaven. She is not mentioned around the throne room of God, nor does she appear by name on the Day of Judgment. While not demeaning or discounting Mary or her very real and poignant relationship with Jesus, the Scriptures—our only *infallible* source of spiritual understanding—hint at nothing more special about Mary, mother of Jesus, than is true of any other daughter of God.

DELIVERANCE FROM DEMONIC OBSTRUCTIONS (LUKE 11:14-26)

And now to the timely sequence of statements in Luke’s Gospel: What were the things that Jesus was saying just before the woman in the crowd interjected with her loud comments about His mother? What had been happening? What was going on?

1. Jesus was casting out (ejecting, expelling, sending away) a demon.
2. When the demon had gone out (departed, issued forth, gone away or abroad), the mute man could speak again; the crowd marveled at what they saw.
3. The Pharisees, who did not want people to follow Jesus, claimed that His power to cast out demons was, itself demonic and satanic. They called Him Beelzebub (dung-god).

4. Others wanted Jesus to prove His spirituality by doing a big-time, arbitrary miracle—something more spectacular than just delivering a man from evil. Jesus refused.
5. He simply pointed out the illogic of imagining that the very evil which sought to overpower the mute man would work against itself to effect his rescue. A kingdom (realm, extent of rule or authority) divided cannot stand.
6. “No,” Jesus exclaimed, “I am not delivering this man using the authority of Satan; I am ministering deliverance to Him through the power of God—an authority and dominion so much greater than Satan’s, that it only takes the strength in God’s little finger to overpower (subdue, conquer, get complete victory over) Satan’s strongest defense (Luke 11:17-20 paraphrased).
7. Delivering a person from evil, casting out a demon from someone’s life is like plundering the enemy, and taking away from him what he has held captive.
8. After being driven out of a person, demons seek other spots where they can rest (stop, cease from work), like a sword in a scabbard. Not easily finding any such places, the demon will always check back at its former house (dwelling, temple).
9. If a delivered person has merely tidied up and done some casual rearrangement of the life-elements remaining after the demon was driven out—and the Holy Spirit has not been invited in to fill places vacated by the demon—the evil spirit will re-enter the person and bring along seven other demons to set up shop, as well. The last situation is worse than the first.