

## 6. The Challenge of His Sayings (2Q 2008—The Wonder of Jesus)

**Biblical material:** Matt. 5:48; 18:21, 22; 19:3-12; Luke 12:32-34; John 7:46; 19:25-27.

### Quotes

- Jesus was the first socialist, the first to seek a better life for mankind. *Mikhail Gorbachev*
- Theologians have felt no hesitation in founding a system of speculative thought on the teachings of Jesus; and yet Jesus was never an inhabitant of the realm of speculative thought. *Walter Rauschenbusch*
- I have read in Plato and Cicero sayings that are very wise and very beautiful; but I never read in either of them: “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden.” *Augustine*
- It was this same Jesus, the Christ who, among many other remarkable things, said and repeated something which, proceeding from any other being would have condemned him at once as either a bloated egotist or a dangerously unbalanced person...when He said He himself would rise again from the dead, the third day after He was crucified, He said something that only a fool would dare say, if he expected longer the devotion of any disciples—unless He was sure He was going to rise. No founder of any world religion known to men ever dared say a thing like that! *Wilbur Smith*

### Questions

In what way did the sayings of Jesus attract attention? How are they also a challenge? What do we do with his sayings that seem hard to understand? Why did Jesus give us sayings that challenge us? Why was he so provocative? What are the dangers of making statements that can be easily misunderstood? What are the consequences of *not* challenging people? How does this fit in with the issues in the great controversy?

### Discussion/ Comment

“He speaks like nobody ever did before.” John 7:46 FBV. It seems that even the temple guards were stunned by what Jesus said! However we also may be surprised at some of the things Jesus said, and struggle to explain them. The lesson lists a few:

- Matthew 19:2-13 about marriage, divorce—and eunuchs!
- Matthew 18:21-35 about forgiveness, keeping record—and a lord who tortures!
- Luke 12:32-34 about wealth, giving—and selling possessions/treasure location
- Matthew 5:48 about being perfect—and what Jesus really meant by this
- John 19:25-27 about family, responsibilities—and even rejecting your mother (and what about even *hating* your family as Jesus says in Luke 14:26?)

All of these would be very interesting discussion starters—and maybe that was also the intention of Jesus—to get us thinking! He did not want to give mundane advice that did not change anything. His very life was to be a challenge, and his words do the same. In fact Jesus rarely speaks without challenging common understandings or

traditional views. The sermon on the mount is full of “you have heard it said, but I say to you.” His value system is the opposite of this world’s, and he makes it clear that all has to change!

So many times Jesus turns what we expect upside-down. As he tries to explain the meaning and values of his kingdom he uses stories that stand “conventional wisdom” on its head. Baffling, intriguing, shocking, surprising, never routine, always memorable, the stories stand out. By their very unusual character they help us see and understand the real nature of the spiritual world.

Jesus challenges us to look again at what we think we know, and make us recognize that our assumptions, especially about God and the way He works, are usually wrong. Jesus tells what I like to call reversal stories: stories that are the opposite of what you would expect, told perhaps with irony or humor or dramatic license.

Simple but never simplistic, radical but never ridiculous, pointed but never personal--Jesus used these reversal stories to help people see where they were, and took them by the hand to where they needed to be. And, though we never have described for us Jesus’ tone of voice, some are certainly told with a smile, or with a sense of the ironic. It is surely no mistake that the key ingredient of humor is the unexpected, the unusual end result of a chain of actions.

So as Jesus told these stories that reverse our ideas and concepts, perhaps we should first of all recognize that through these stories of the unusual, we are being asked to look not for parallels and allegories, but for the central idea that we so often mistake. Add to this my belief that though told with deeply serious intent, Jesus is asking us to smile at ourselves and our foolishness.

### **Ellen White Comments**

[John 6:53-58 quoted] The Jews appeared to be horrified at these sayings of Christ. Their law strictly forbade them to taste blood, and they construed his language into a sacrilegious speech, and contended and disputed over his words among themselves. Jesus gave his disciples, and the people, lessons which they could not at the time fully comprehend, because of their moral darkness. Many things which his followers did not fully understand when he uttered them, were made plain by subsequent events. His words were a stay to their hearts when he walked no more with them.

Even the disciples murmured at these last words of Jesus. They said, “This is a hard saying; who can hear it?” The Saviour heard their complaints and answered them: “Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where he was before? It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” Thus he instructed them that it was not his human flesh that would give life eternal, but faith in his words and in the efficacy of the sacrifice he was to make for the world. His teaching and example, his life and death, were the heavenly food that was to give them spiritual life and vigor. He reproved them because they had murmured when he said that he had come down from Heaven. If they were not able to receive this truth, how would it be when he ascended before their eyes to that Heaven from whence he came? {2SP 283}