



Hard Sayings of Jesus

Lesson 13: Hard Sayings—So that some *won't* hear?!

Opening Prayer

Introduction

God says through the Prophet Isaiah, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” (55:8-9). Give some examples of how this is true.

God does say that his purpose is always accomplished. Sum up what God’s will for mankind is.

How do you know that’s true?

Studying God’s Word

God clearly tells us that he wants all people to be saved. He won that salvation by the death of his Son, and he brings that salvation to us by his Word. But as our study closes, Jesus tells us some words that are difficult to understand and seem to fly in the face of those truths.

Matthew 13:10-15 The disciples came to him and asked, “Why do you speak to the people in parables?” ¹¹ He replied, “The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. ¹² Whoever has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables: “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. ¹⁴ In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: ‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. ¹⁵ For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’”

1. Jesus had just told his parable about a sower scattering seed (verses 1-9). Some grows, but most does not. Jesus gave the people an urgent call to hear at the end of the parable. What question were the disciples left with?
2. Explain why Jesus’ answer is so difficult to hear.
3. Give the two purposes that Jesus indicates he has for speaking in parables.
4. Agree or disagree (and why?): Sometimes the purpose of God’s Word is to harden the hearts of unbelievers in their unbelief.

Isaiah 6 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. ⁵ "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." ⁶ Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." ⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

⁹ He said, "Go and tell this people: 'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.' ¹⁰ Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

¹¹ Then I said, "For how long, O Lord?" And he answered: "Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, ¹² until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken. ¹³ And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land."

5. The source of Jesus' quote is equally hard. What was the spiritual condition of Israel in Isaiah's day? Why wouldn't God want his people to believe and be saved?
6. It's a terrible thing to think of God using his Word to harden hearts! Should we ever be afraid it could happen to us?
7. It's important to keep in mind God's good purpose in mind even in judgment. Consider God's word through Paul concerning the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. How does Paul connect Pharaoh's hardening with God's grace?

Romans 9:14-18, 22-24 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! ¹⁵ For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." ¹⁶ It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." ¹⁸ Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.

...²² What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? ²³ What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory— ²⁴ even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles?

Matthew 13:18-23 “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. ²² The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

8. Jesus explains the meaning of his parable now—but it’s one that people still often misunderstand. What is the point?
9. What should this parable lead us to...
 - a. be on guard against?
 - b. strive to do?
 - c. give glory to God for?

Summary

- God’s chief purpose in sharing his Word is to lead people to faith.
- A secondary purpose of God’s Word is to harden the hearts of persistent unbelievers.
- God’s chief purpose in sharing his Word is to lead people to faith.

Closing Prayer