

I have a little book stored away somewhere that's always worth paging through now and again. It's full of wise sayings and advice that often seem to help put the world back in focus. No, I'm not talking about the Bible. This particular book is a little different - the authors are all in grade school. This particular book is a collection of surprisingly wise things parents have overheard from their kids, and it's a tiny monument to the phrase, "kids say the darndest things..." After all, who else is going to tell you, "A penny saved is...not much."?

Even though this little book is advertised as kids being wise, it's really being played for laughs, right? And we're all in on the joke - no adult is actually looking for the answers to their life's problems in the mind of a child. That just wouldn't make sense! And yet we can't deny that kids are often able to "tell it like it is"; they just don't have the same inhibitions that grown folks do. They can be open and honest in times and places that people with more experience could never hope to be.

Expecting a child to have all the answers is a contradiction; someone with only a few years' experience is no expert. Contradictions like this are important signs for us because they tell us something isn't quite right. Two opposing things can't be true at the same time, one has to be wrong! So when our Savior Jesus speaks in contradictions in our reading today, how do we respond? Our first instinct might be to notice that things don't match up - and that's true. But when other contradictions show us that something has gone very wrong, the contradictions Jesus uses show us that something has gone very right instead.

What do I mean by contradictions? Jesus uses three contradictory statements in today's lesson to illustrate his point: that children understand things that wise adults don't, that his yoke is easy, and his burden is light. All of these statements contain two truths that can't be true at the same time - or can they? In order for us to understand what Jesus is saying, we need to know why he's saying it in the first place.

Did you notice how the reading begins with the words, "at that time Jesus said?" We're picking up in the middle of a narrative, and where Jesus has been points us to where Jesus is going. Jesus had been preaching to a crowd about John the Baptist, praising John for his ministry but also proclaiming judgment against those who had rejected him. For Jesus, this rejection was particularly frustrating because it was being done by Jews - descendants of God's chosen people who should have recognized the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in John, and later in Jesus.

Jesus had been performing miracles in towns around Judea, but people still questioned and rejected him. John the Baptist preached a message of repentance and was turned away. Why? What could make people so familiar with Old Testament prophecy about the coming Savior resist both Jesus and John? The easy answer is sin, but the way Jesus speaks out against the stubborn Jews reveals something more specific; they were relying on their own wisdom.

To be clear, I'm not saying that reason is bad, or that science is evil - far from it! But even though God has given humanity the ability to accomplish incredible things with the minds He has given us, those minds have limitations we need to be aware of. Reason can lead us to make informed decisions that lead to peace, order, and good government. Scientific study reveals new and exciting information that helps us understand more about the world God has made, and leads to new technology that makes our earthly lives easier. But what these things cannot do is tell us what will happen to us when we die, how the universe was created, or how we can be saved. In short - reason is useful for earthly things, not spiritual things.

This is where sin truly enters the picture. Because of sin, the human mind lives and works for itself, and not for God. In fact, our sinful hearts and minds hate God, and are hostile to the truth! Instead of a blessing, our ability to think and reason can become a barrier between people and God. Have you ever heard someone tear down the Bible, because what it says about the creation of the world doesn't match what scientists say? Has anyone ever pointed a finger at God, accusing Him of being too violent, or unloving, or hateful, because His words or actions didn't match their idea of

ethics, logic, or reason? Have you ever experienced thoughts like those yourself, when wrestling with a challenging piece of Scripture?

Our minds see these things as contradictions, and immediately send up red flags, saying, “Something’s wrong! This doesn’t match up!” The people that Jesus was preaching to in Judea were experiencing the same sensation. Looking at what Jesus says from a worldly point of view, what he says doesn’t seem to make any sense! It contradicts what we are told by smarter, wiser people than ourselves, it clashes with what we see and experience, and that makes our sinful minds suspicious. But even though Jesus is speaking in contradictions, he’s being very clear, and what he has to say is the most important message of all!

The first contradiction that catches our attention is that there are things hidden from the wise and the learned, but revealed to little children. How is this possible? We’ve already talked about kids not being wiser than their elders, but Jesus says as much plainly here. In terms of earthly wisdom this might not be true, but when it comes to faith, we couldn’t have this stated any other way. Faith can’t be discovered or learned - faith is a gift! If faith depended on our ability to reason it out, then only the smartest would be saved! But just as Paul told the Corinthians, “God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.” Faith depends on hearing the Word of God, not on our intelligence. So Jesus can rightly say about little children, “the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.”

And what about this burden Jesus mentions? Burdens are heavy, tough to carry - that’s what makes them burdens! A light burden is a contradiction, so what does Jesus mean? When the Law forces us to see how sinful we are, that becomes a heavy burden, far too much for any person to carry. The more we become aware of how lost we are, the farther into despair we fall. But Jesus takes the burden of our sins away. We are able to stand up under the weight of sin because Jesus has removed that weight for us. But more on that later!

Last, what does Jesus mean by an easy yoke? Yokes are stiff, heavy things that rest on the neck of an animal team to keep them moving together. Yokes are a sign of hard work! If that doesn’t sound “easy,” then consider how we are “yoked” to Jesus - not by a piece of wood, but by faith. And it becomes our joy to be yoked to Jesus! To walk in step with him, to learn and grow in our faith, is a blessing. When we follow Christ faithfully, his burden becomes lighter and his yoke becomes easier.

And all this is made possible by the greatest contradiction of all time. The immortal died for the mortal. The sinless took on the sins of the sinners. The creator gave himself up for the created. Yes, dear friends, even while we were still sinners, God loved us and sent His Son to die for us. Even though we had done nothing to earn or deserve it, God sacrificed His own Son in our place so that we could be free from our sins forever. Logically, it makes no sense - there is no reason that the Almighty God should do something so amazing for lowly sinners like you and me. It contradicts everything that reason tells us. Thank God for that contradiction!

I’ve been told by some that the Bible is riddled with contradictions. They say there are thousands of places in the Bible that say two completely different things - and therefore, it can’t be trusted. But what is the Gospel but a great contradiction? That the perfect, holy creator of the universe would come to earth and die for imperfect, unholy people doesn’t make any logical sense - but what a beautiful thing that is! To know that you are saved not because of what you know, or how smart you are, but because Jesus gave up everything for you and gave you the benefits when you heard His Word - that’s something that contradicts everything the wisdom of this world knows. But praise God, because it’s a contradiction that saves! Amen.