

Hanging Out With Jesus: How To Answer Questions About Jesus

Matthew 21:23-32

Good morning, men! So let's go ahead and do a shout out this morning. I did a men's retreat for the Denver United Methodist Church of Denver, NC a couple of years ago, and they've started doing the online Bible Study with us. So today we want to give a shout out to you men. They don't have a name for their group, so they're the "No Name Group". Mike Bizon is their leader and they meet on Monday mornings at 8:00am. They've been joining us for quite some time and I wonder if you would join me in giving them a great rousing Man in the Mirror welcome. One, two, three, hoorah! Welcome, glad you're here!

So the series we're in is *Hanging Out With Jesus*. The title of the talk today is *How To Answer Questions About Jesus*. It is customary, even sport, to blame Christianity for the failings of non-Christianity. You might want to think about that one for a while. One of the reasons for blaming Christianity for the failings of non-Christianity is that Christianity is so messy, it's a very messy religion. The reason it's so messy is because of what Christians believe. Christians, for example, believe that we include sinners, as many sinners as possible. All other religions in the world exclude sinners, in other words you have to become righteous in order to become part of the religion. In Christianity we say no one's righteous, come be part of the religion because you are a sinner, not because you have overcome that. So we have a lot of sinners that are involved in Christianity and they make mistakes, we do sloppy things. Even if you have been walking with God for a long time you know that you still sin and you do so every day. We welcome that. Christianity is the most inclusive of all the religions, that's one of the reasons it's one of the biggest. It's the largest religion in the world because it's the most inclusive. That's one of the things that we believe.

Another thing that we believe in is the sovereignty of God. We believe that God is sovereignly orchestrating all human events to bring us into a right relationship with him and a right relationship with each other. It is the normal practice of God to take people who do not yet believe in Jesus and Christianity and put them in families. That's just his normal practice. So many of you, probably most of you, have people in your families who don't believe in Jesus Christ, who have not trusted in him for their eternal life. We believe that Christianity is messy because it is so inclusive, we include so many sinners, then God puts these sinners in families so that we can take care of them. All of the pain, anguish, and sorrow that you have in ministering to people in your family, and also people at work and in your neighborhoods, is because God has put us out there to be his witnesses.

Christians believe one more thing I'd like to mention by way of preface, and that is that there is opposition to this mission. John 10:10 we all know it, Jesus says the thief, referring to the devil, comes to steal and to kill and to destroy. In other words, the devil wants to kill you and he's doing everything he can to destroy and to steal from you and those that you love, those that don't yet know Jesus. The difference is that you are no longer under the deception. Everyone else is, but you're no better than they are, you just have grace and have been relieved of that deception, and the deception runs something like this, that Satan is going to make you think you have it right until it's too late to do anything about it. That's what he's aiming for. Satan is wanting you to think that you are happy until it's too late to turn back. In other words, Satan wants you to think that you're right in holding your wife accountable to whatever until it's too late to save your marriage. He wants you to think it's so important to do this life changing work to the neglect of your kids until they're grown and gone, and then you have the regret of having done that. He wants you to think that by accumulating all this debt that this is what's really going to make you happy until it's too late to pay it back, and then you have to declare bankruptcy. That's the deception, but Jesus said I have come that you might have life and have it to the full. So this is what Christians believe, and overcoming these deceptions and falsehoods is part of the mission of being a witness.

This is an application oriented Bible Study. We talk about the Bible and what was going on then so that we may understand, but we are then trying to turn up the wick and figure out how we can apply this Bible to the real problems and the real opportunities that we face every day, right here, right now in this community, in your families and your workplace. So what I'd like you to do right now is I would like you to picture somebody that you care about deeply who's not walking with God. It might be someone who is a Christian but has back slid, who has fallen off. It might be someone who is a Christian who thinks they have de-converted. It might be a cultural Christian who is engrossed in worldly pursuits, in some kind of a deception. It might be an agnostic that you know that's filled with doubts about Christianity. It might be a hostile, it might even be a hostile that's in your own family. Or some captious person, who no matter what you say they are always coming up with some sort of fault finding attack on your faith. So what we want to talk about is how do we answer the questions that people have about Jesus.

Last night when I woke up I had a voice mail. My brother Pete called last night and man was I glad I wasn't there to answer the phone. I've been talking on Facebook about these things and about the idea of not to put people down and refute them but to help them and work with them. He's really taking that to heart, and he was talking with an atheist he works with, and the atheist asked the question, "Why are there so many religions if there's only one God?" And you know I've answered that question a hundred times, but there are questions like that where you need a little time to get your thoughts together. So I was so glad I didn't have to take that call last night because I didn't want my brother to know how stupid I am. So that's the backdrop for what we're going to look at today.

What Is The Question And Why?

Now we're going to look at one specific question that is asked of Jesus today, and what is the question and why. Let's look at in Matthew 21 and we'll start at verse 23:

Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching (and we also know from one of the parallel passages, preaching), the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him (and we also know scribes were there, too, from one of the other parallel passages. These were the religious leaders of the people and they asked him this question). "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?"

So here's the situation, it's Tuesday, Jesus is going to be crucified on Friday. A lot is going to happen in these last few days. We're going to learn so much from Jesus himself in these last three days and there's a great lesson about to happen here. But first, by what authority do you do these things - what is he referring to by these things? These are the teachings of Jesus, the cleansing of the temple, the healing that he's performed, the miracles he's performed, his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and they wanted to know, in modern terms, who do you think you are? Who gave you this authority? The reason they ask this question is because this represents a direct challenge to their authority. They are the ones in charge, and you know just from your secular life that when somebody has power and position and you challenge that, they have a vested interest in protecting that. That's all that's going on here. So there's jealousy, there's envy, and then what's really going on here is that this question is not a sincere question. This is an insincere question because they are setting a trap, they're wanting to trap Jesus into making some kind of mistake so that they can arrest him. But notice something interesting, they are not denying that these things happened. Today, people actually deny that these things happened, but they were there, they were eye witnesses, so there's no denial that this is the truth. It's interesting, that was then, and now things are a little bit different, the questions would be a little bit different now because people would want to know is it really true, can I really believe it? But let me just say a word, if you have people who wonder if it's true, we actually know so much that is assumed not to be know. For example, we actually know that there was a historical Jesus. There is more evidence for the existence of the historical person of Jesus, without respect to his identity, than any other person who has ever lived! No thinking person, no deliberating, intellectual person, doubts that there was a historical Jesus that lived. That's well established.

Secondly, people wonder if the Bible is actually accurate because of all the different translations and all the different copying that was done, but let me set your minds at ease. Because of the science of textual criticism, which is the science of identifying all the variances between manuscripts and then comparing all the manuscripts together, there's absolutely no scientific doubt whatsoever that we absolutely have what the Biblical writers wrote down. Now whether it's true or not, that's a different issue, but there's no question that what the Biblical writers wrote, we have. That's all been taken care of. So we know there was a Jesus and we know that what's written in the Bible is what was actually written by the people who wrote it, the only question that remains, is it true? Now they didn't doubt that it was true,

because they were seeing it. Today some people doubt it's true, so you have to know the drift of why the questions are being asked, it's because the questions are different now than they were then. But we're going to continue with what was going on with Jesus.

Let's look at how he responded to the question he was asked, because there is a great insight in here for how we can answer the questions that we are asked. Verse 24:

Jesus replied, "I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism - where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?"

They discussed it among themselves...

This is very interesting; why didn't they just say, well we asked you first? It's because they had a deep respect for Jesus. This was not some Looney Toon radical, this was someone considered by all people, at least the prophets, to be a great man of God. He was doing great things, and they recognized that, and so they didn't just dismiss that question, they discussed it among themselves and said, reading on:

"If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' But if we say, 'From men - we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.'"

See, the issue here is that John had seen the heavens open up and the Holy Spirit descend and light on Jesus. John had said he must become greater, I must become less. He is the Messiah, I am not worthy to untie his sandals. So John has identified Jesus as the Lord, and they recognized that they were in a conundrum, verse 27:

So they answered Jesus, "We don't know."

It's kind of like the guilty guy that gets put on the witness stand and he's asked the question and takes the 5th Amendment. I can't remember!

Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."

So in answering questions about Jesus, it's a good idea to identify whether or not the person asking the question really wants an answer. See, they didn't really want an answer to their question, what they really wanted was something that they could use to trap Jesus. So, how he handled this was by telling them a parable. Verse 28:

"What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'

"'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

"Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.

"Which of the two did what his father wanted?"

(Notice now they answer him out of respect) "The first," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you (he's not necessarily saying that they're not going to enter at all, but these other people are going to enter ahead of you). For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

Notice that Jesus is not trying to win the argument, he's trying to win their souls. Do you see that? Do you see what Jesus is doing? He's not trying to win some kind of a debate about what his authority is, he's turning the conversation based on his motivation, which is to help save their souls. He is showing them that they've made an error, but he's also showing them the way to eternal life. Even after you saw this you did not repent and believe him; the implication, the insight there is that these other people are coming into heaven before you despite what they've done and this is what you need to do. So the Big Idea today is this: **Let's win souls, not arguments.** Brothers, let's win souls, not arguments. We live in one of the most argumentative times in recent history, most contentious time in recent history, and my own theory is that people are not more stupid than they used to be, it's just that we have much more access to opinions through Facebook and Twitter and everything. People say stupid things because of social media, though this is starting to settle down from the beginnings of it, but the vitriol and sarcasm... Actually I was reading this morning while Googling some things for Pete, and I Googled if all religion's the same, why one God. Something like that, and man, you cannot believe all the articles that people write on this from all different perspectives, but I only found one Christian guy commenting on

this article representing all of us. It was one sarcastic remark after another, one put down after another, and I'm thinking to myself, "Well, this is good... This is going to be very helpful..." Let's win souls, brothers, not arguments; that's what Jesus is trying to do in this passage.

What Is The Authority of Jesus?

This is kind of a sidebar, but since this is an application oriented Bible Study, I want you to know what is the authority of Jesus. Many of you have or are either under the authority of an employer who has the ability to hire you, to fire you, to promote you, to stall your career. Maybe you have a loan application and somebody has the authority to either grant or deny your application. So that's what authority is. Jesus has this authority, Matthew 28:18-20. We call it the great commission but it starts out with this:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Now that doesn't mean that he is a policeman who will issue a ticket to every traffic violator. They don't always do that, and in the same way Jesus, even though he has jurisdiction over the whole earth, even though he has the authority over the whole earth, that doesn't mean that he is going around policing every little thing. Sometimes he lets things unfold because he's working everything for the greater good, we've talked about that many times here. But the point is he has this authority, all this authority and because he has this authority he then goes on in the next verse to say:

Therefore for that reason, because I have all authority, here's what I want you to do. I want you to go and win the arguments, I want you to refute the agnostics, I want you to crush the atheists... No, and yet you see well intentioned Christians doing this all the time, don't you? Jesus doesn't care about crushing the atheist or refuting the agnostic or blowing some argument up and making the point. If you think you will win someone to Jesus on points, brothers that's just never going to happen. You're never going to win someone to faith on the merits of the case. It is the love of Jesus, the Big Idea a couple weeks ago, **it is the simple story of his life, death, and resurrection, that always has, and always will, draw people to himself.** We're not going to win the argument, and so Jesus does have the authority, and he gives that authority to us. The authority is to do the Big Idea, and that is to **win souls, not arguments.**

How To Answer Sincere and Insincere Questions

How should we answer both sincere and insincere questions? Four things, number one: understand who's asking. In other words, it's important to know when you're giving an answer why the person is asking, what their motivations are. In our ministry we use this typology, these four types of people, and the first type are allies, the second type are receptive, the third type are non-receptive and the fourth

type are opponents. This works in business, this works anywhere, it's not just Christian thinking. You have allies, you have people that no matter what you say, they are going to believe. On the other extreme you have opponents, and no matter what you say, they are never going to believe. You can have the most persuasive argument in the world with these people and it's just not going to make a difference. It's these two middle categories, the receptive and non-receptive, which is where most of the action is. For those that are receptive, you can just talk about the story of Jesus in simple terms because they're wanting to know that truth, they're wanting to know the truth of Jesus. You can talk about the Bible, you can explain yeah we know that Jesus was a real person and yeah we know that we have exactly what the Biblical writers wrote down, and yes there are good arguments that it's true and that you can believe it and put your faith in Jesus. You can have your sins forgiven and receive eternal life. Would you like to do that? Would you like to do that right now? Let's do that, let's bow our heads right now. Let's pray, invite Jesus into your life. Why don't I pray a prayer out loud one phrase at a time? You can repeat it after me, and people will come to Christ.

At our ministry, I've got the greatest job in the world! Every day we see men coming to Jesus and growing in their faith! Every day! Christianity is flourishing men! A lot of people think that Christianity is failing; it's not failing, non-Christianity is failing! All the problems in the world, it's not because Christianity is failing, it's because non-Christianity is failing! But as I said it has become normal practice, even sport, to blame Christianity for the failings of non-Christianity.

So you have these receptive people, but then you have these non-receptive people too, and these are people who have doubts. They're always honest doubts. Let me tell you, if somebody has doubts about Jesus, it's not that they woke up and prayed God give me doubts about yourself. It's the deception that's creating the doubts. Why are we angry at non-Christians for not believing!? Oh my goodness! Nobody disbelieves out of intent to be wicked and evil! People disbelieve and have doubts because of the deception, because of what I said at the beginning, the John 10:10 thing, because the devil, the enemy has convinced them that they have become happy, and he wants to keep them in that bondage until it's too late for them to do anything about it when he reverses their course. So that's what's going on with men, that's what's going on with people. I want to be so sensitive to this non-receptive person who has these honest doubts. But they've believed a lie, and if that's you I'm sorry, but you've believed a lie, you've exchanged the glory of God for an idol and the truth of God for a lie. But if I come on, or you come on to somebody like that without respect and without sensitivity and without understanding that it's not their fault... It's a disease! Sin is like an addiction, and you can't just stop doing it. It would be like blaming somebody for having cancer. You idiot! I can't believe that you have cancer! How could you do that? You're so stupid! Let me tell you why you shouldn't have cancer, and I'm going to make every point, I'm going to refute every reason that you have for having cancer. That's what it would be like trying to win an argument with somebody who's non-receptive, it doesn't make any sense. That's the first thing, know who you're talking to.

The second thing is always keep the goal in mind. The goal is never to refute someone, it's never to win the argument, it's always to love them so perfectly that they begin to doubt their doubt. If you can love

someone so perfectly that they begin to doubt their doubt, then this is how you move them from non-receptive to receptive.

Third thing, supervise yourself. Your own motives, your own heart. If you get angry at people because they won't become Christians, then guess what? That's a you issue, that's not a them issue. Why are you angry? Is it because you can't control the other person? Why are you sarcastic with people? Do you really have that low of a view of human dignity that you would do that to someone? Or in supervising yourself, do you not love people the way that Jesus wants? Love God above all else so that you can love his children, the people he created, above all else.

Fourth and finally, don't impede grace. Get out of the way. It is the story of Jesus, and you can tell your Jesus story, and that's good, do that please! Tell people your story about Jesus, but don't impede the work of grace by setting up rules or tests, or make somebody take a blood oath, or perform in some way, because Christianity is the religion that doesn't do that. We're the religion that invites sinners. We love sinners! The more the better! We're the most inclusive religion of all so don't impede grace, but because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy, has made us alive in Christ. Even when we were dead in our transgressions and sins, it is by grace that we have been saved. The Big Idea this morning, **let's win souls, not arguments**. Let's pray!

Closing Prayer

Dearest Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for showing us how Jesus answered questions. Thank you for showing us how we can apply that kind of thinking to the questions and the type of people that we will come in contact with today. Lord, recalibrate our hearts to understand the kind of people that we're talking to. Make sure we put the goal that you have in mind first, to supervise ourselves and not get in the way of grace. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen!