

## More About Jesus, Week 21: Jesus answered questions well

(Mark 11-12)

by Paul Hammons

It isn't a surprise that as a well-known teacher, Jesus was asked a lot of questions. People asked him about his teaching, his behavior, his choices, even the actions of his followers.

And those questions came from all sorts of people, with motivations ranging from genuine interest to confusion to duplicity and hypocrisy.

Being the "Good Teacher" (**Mark 10:17**), Jesus always knew not only the right answer, but the right approach to answering the question.

In some cases, the best way to answer was not to answer at all! In **Mark 11**, after Jesus had cleansed the temple, the Jewish leaders found him in the city and demanded, "*By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?*"

Given that he had overturned the moneychangers' tables and driven the sellers out of the temple grounds, that was a reasonable question to ask. But it was a question Jesus had answered in multiple ways throughout his life, both through his teaching and through his miracles, which testified that he had been given both power AND authority from God (**Mark 2:10**).

Jesus had told the Jewish leaders the source of his authority before - many times!

*"For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man."* - **John 5:25-27**

Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount made it clear that he claimed authority to not only teach but also interpret the law. So when the Pharisees came to him demanding to know the source of his authority, the purpose wasn't to clear up any misconceptions or come to a decision on Jesus and his authority. That decision had already been made.

The questions from there on out were intended only to interfere, to cast doubt in the minds of the people, and to find ways to entrap Jesus with his own words.

Jesus, recognizing a dishonest question, chose in this case not to answer:

*Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question; answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was the baptism of John from heaven or from man? Answer me." And they discussed it with one another, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why then did you not believe him?' But shall we say, 'From man?'"—they were afraid of the people, for they all held that John really was a prophet. So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."* - **Mark 11:29-30**

This was the first of many questions Jesus faced through the rest of the week, all intended to trap him. The next question (**Mark 12:13**) was intended to force Jesus to take sides in a debate on paying tax to Caesar, at which point he could be painted as either a rebel against the Roman empire or a traitor to his people. His answer: "*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's*" (**Mk 12:17**).

When the Sadducees gave him an elaborate and unrealistic hypothetical question intended to ridicule the concept of a resurrection, Jesus simply refused to accept the premise of their question: "*Is this not the reason you are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?*" (**Mk 12:24**)?

But when an honest question came up - one intended to test Jesus not against prevailing human wisdom or tradition, but against the word of God itself, Jesus answered clearly and directly (**Mark 12:29-31**), leading the scribe to respond, "*You are right, Teacher.*" In contrast to the combative nature of the previous exchanges, Jesus answered the man, "*You are not far from the kingdom of God.*" (**Mk 12:34**).

As Christians, our lives provoke questions from everyone around us if our faith is visible in our behavior and our speech. Some of those questions may be disingenuous attempts to trip us up or make us look foolish. Some of them may be honest attempts to better understand our faith, maybe even opening the door for the questioners to seek the Lord themselves.

We are called to be "*wise as serpents and innocent as doves*" (**Mat. 10:16**) in our interaction with the world, with our speech gracious, "*seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person*" (**Col. 4:6**). Jesus is our perfect model in how our answers - or our refusal to engage with foolish disputes - can show Christ in our speech, and in our relationships with others.