

Jesus Answers "Gotcha" Questions

DAVE BAST

For someone who, according to the Bible, never did anything wrong or harmed a soul, Jesus was a remarkably polarizing figure. Some people were immediately attracted to him; so much so that when he invited them to follow him, they got right up, left everything—jobs, homes, families—and started out after him; but other people, particularly people with social prestige or wealth or power, could not stand Jesus. They were annoyed by his popularity. They were offended by his claims. They rejected his appeals. In fact, these people, including most of the priests, the theology professors, the government leaders of his day, did not just reject Jesus, they did everything they could to discredit him. They wanted to destroy Jesus' reputation so that others would reject him, too. It makes you wonder, doesn't it? What would make people hate Jesus so much? Let's think about that today on *Groundwork*. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and Scott, today we come to the fourth in our series of programs for Lent, for this season when we think about the cross and draw closer and closer to the great events of Holy Week, of the passion of Christ, that create our salvation, really.

So, we are looking at the things that he said and did in the days immediately before that—the time between Sunday—Palm Sunday when he entered the city and first then cleansed the Temple, and then Thursday, which was the last supper and on to Good Friday. So, we are dealing with these words and actions of Jesus in those first few days.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and we did look at the cleansing of the Temple. We looked at that very curious incident where he curses a fig tree. In the last program, we looked at a parable Jesus told in that last week—a parable of judgment—the parable of the tenants; and then we get...in the synoptic gospels we get a series of interactions between Jesus and sort of the Temple establishment, Jesus and the key religious leaders of his day, who really were, by this time, openly posturing themselves as opponents, as enemies of Jesus; and we get a rapid-fire series of what we could call some gotcha questions...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Questions designed to trip Jesus up, get him in trouble. They want to get rid of him, right? We saw that after the parable of the tenants. They knew that Jesus was speaking against them. They are angry; but the crowds are still following him. Well, how can we turn the crowds on Jesus? Well, let's get him on tape, as it were. Let's get him to say something heretical. Let's get him to say something that is going to be treasonous, that will get him in trouble even with Rome, maybe. Let's trip him so he falls flat on his face; everybody will see it and then the crowds won't be on his side and we can do what we want to do.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Some of this is almost comical how hard they try, but that is what we are going to look at in this program, several questions they ask Jesus with the hope that he will mess up.

DAVE BAST

As you were just saying that, Scott, it struck me: What a contrast our own moment in history is; when it seems like public figures can say almost anything and it does not matter. People just dismiss it or they ignore it or they say it didn't happen.

So they are going to try...the authorities are really going to try to get Jesus and to discredit him...to make him lose his popular following...his popularity...to turn him into a figure that the crowd will turn against; and it does make you wonder, as I said in the open to this program, why would people...especially the leadership—the people who knew the Bible, who taught the Bible—why would they be so against him?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

You know, it almost makes you scratch your head, doesn't it?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, except that, of course, you know, in the wider context of the Gospels, Jesus as Messiah does not take the shape of the Messiah they were expecting...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They were looking for a military hero or something; and above all, for a lot of the Temple establishment, Jesus did not keep the Law the way they interpreted it. He kept healing on the Sabbath; he kept breaking Sabbath; he kept mixing with the wrong crowd—touching lepers, touching dead bodies—all of which technically made him unclean. They had a certain view of the Law, and Jesus threatened that view of the Law. Now of course, Jesus, as the Son of God, is the fulfillment of the Law...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So he really cannot break the Law, but they didn't know that; they didn't think that; they just saw this guy as a lawbreaker; and the Messiah cannot be a lawbreaker. So, if people take Jesus' take on things...if they follow his way, the Pharisees and chief priests and Sadducees are going to be discredited.

DAVE BAST

By way of background, before we get into the gotcha questions that we want to look at, we could observe that there were two things, really, that happened during this last week or shortly before it, that tipped the scales against Jesus in the minds of the authorities. They had been opposed to him for a long time, and if you read the whole Gospels through—all four of them—you see that early on they began to sort of resist him, attack him at times; they were angry, they wanted to get rid of him; but at the end, they decided: Okay, this is it; now we are going to go for it; and there were a couple of things that made them do that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In John's Gospel, he raised Lazarus from the dead. Curiously enough, we do not read that in Matthew, Mark and Luke, but that becomes a key. I mean, he did such a great miracle that who couldn't believe in him now. So, they are angry about that; and then, of course, he literally shook up the Temple establishment with that cleansing we looked at in the first program; and by the way, speaking of that, we can kind of pick this up a little bit in Mark 11, which is where he cleanses the Temple; and then Jesus comes back, and now they are really looking for a way, as we said, to trip him up; and actually, this series of questions begins here in Mark 11:

²⁷They (that is, Jesus and the disciples) arrived again in Jerusalem, and while Jesus was walking in the Temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the Law, and the elders came to him. ²⁸“By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you the authority to do this?” ²⁹Jesus replied, “I will ask you a question. Answer me and I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ³⁰John's baptism, was it from heaven or of human origin? Tell me.” ³¹They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘from heaven,’ he will ask, then, ‘Why did not you believe him?’ ³²If we say, ‘of human origin,’—they feared the people because everybody held John really was a prophet. ³³So they answered Jesus, “We do not know,” and Jesus said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”

So, here is Jesus' little gotcha.

DAVE BAST

He has a gotcha question, too. So, very interesting; he is not going to tell them about his authority. He refuses that. In John's Gospel, after he cleanses the Temple, they ask him for a sign; it is essentially the same thing: What sign do you have; or what gives you the right to act like you own the place? Of course, he *did* own the place...it was his Father's House. He is the heir; so the parable of the tenants again, he is the heir. It all belongs to him; and so they are angry. They have decided they are going to get rid of him. First, though, they want to discredit him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and of course...so they ask him: By who's authority did you just cleanse the Temple...or doing all these things? Jesus knows it doesn't matter how he answers him. They are not going to believe him anyway. If he says: I am doing it by divine authority, they will say: Ah ha! But you healed on the Sabbath; therefore, you cannot be of God. So, he just says: Look, let's start with John, my predecessor: Where did his authority come from? They weasel out of that one because they do not really...they do not want to give John credit for divine authority because they did not like John either; but they do not want to say he had no authority because then the people would turn on them, so they just feign ignorance and say: We don't know; and so, Jesus says: Fine. You are not going to receive whatever answer I give anyway, so I am not going to tell you where my authority comes from. I do not want to play these games with you; and that is what it is. You probably should not play word games with the Word made flesh...

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Is what this comes down to...

DAVE BAST

You are going to lose...guarantee it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; so Jesus says: I do not really want to play these games, but they do; and we are going to see how the game continues in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are digging into several of the incidents—the conversations—that happened between Jesus and his enemies, I think, is not too strong a word now: the authorities—the chief priests—the people with the real power, both religious and political, in Jerusalem, of the Jewish people, have finally decided it is time to pull the trigger. They are going to get rid of Jesus once and for all. They are going to do it sooner rather than later. They were upset by the fact that he raised Lazarus from the dead. They were upset by the parable of the tenants that he spoke against them; and they determined at that moment to get rid of him; and they wanted, first, though, to trip him up—to trap him in his words in some way that could turn the crowd against him, because the big hesitation they had was the fact that the crowd was still in favor of Jesus; so they were worried that if they just grabbed him in the Temple, in public, it might cause a riot.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; but, if they can say to the crowds: Did you hear that? Did you hear that? Did you hear what he just said? That is treason; that is blasphemy. So, now do you see what we have been telling you about this guy all along? He is a fraud.

So, here is how it keeps going. We just saw Jesus' interaction where he did not tell them where his authority came from because Jesus knew they would not believe him anyway...

DAVE BAST

But incidentally, before we get into that, in John they ask for a sign, which is, again, what is your authority? And he says: I will tell you what the sign is. Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it. So, there would be proof, and it would come on Easter—it would come on Sunday of that very week, when Jesus rose from the dead; that he was who he said he was.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But in the meanwhile, some of these verbal games, as we referred to a minute ago, continues; and here is the next attempted gotcha, trip up Jesus question:

^{12:13}Later, they sent some of the Pharisees and Herodians to Jesus to catch him in his words. ¹⁴They came to him and said, "Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity; you are not swayed by others because you pay no attention to who they are. You teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. So, is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not? ¹⁵Should we pay or shouldn't we?" But Jesus knew their hypocrisy. "Why are you trying to trap me?" he asked. "Bring me a denarius and let me look at it." ¹⁶So they brought him the coin and he asked them, "Whose image is this? Whose inscription?" "Caesar's," they replied. ¹⁷Then Jesus said to them, "Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." And they were amazed at him.

DAVE BAST

This is just a great encounter, isn't it? So, to begin with, we have the Pharisees and the Herodians, which is an odd couple—a real odd couple—because the Pharisees were very conservative religiously, they were very devout. The Herodians, as the name implies, were part of the party of the Herod family, who were the rulers of Judea at the time under Roman governorship, and other parts of Palestine as well. The Herods were complete secular people. I mean, they were not even Jewish. They were from outside. They had curried favor with Rome and that is how they got their political power. So, we have conservative religious people with secularists. They are joined together because they both reject Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; the enemy of my enemy is my friend...

DAVE BAST

Yes, something like that, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

These two camps that normally would not have anything to do with each other had a common target, and so they joined forces...

DAVE BAST

And they are just unctuous. They begin with this oozing flattery: Oh, we know you are a teacher sent from God. You teach the way of God. Well, if that is true, then why didn't they accept him?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, that is right; you know they do not even believe it. Oh, we know you teach the way of God. If they believed that, they would be disciples, not enemies and opponents of Jesus. So, right; try to flatter their way. Make Jesus relax, you know; sort of the old line from some of the Godfather mafia movies: Keep your friends close, but your enemies closer; because when you keep your enemy close, they relax; they put their guard down. So, they tried to get Jesus to drop his guard, and then they spring it on him. Hey, you know, big political question. Everybody of the Jews hated the occupation of the Romans. They longed for a new Israel to get rid of Caesar, so they said: Imperial taxes to Rome...should we pay them or not? And Jesus knows what is going on, and so he just says: Bring me a coin.

DAVE BAST

Right; yes, because if he said yes, sure, pay them right off the bat, that would turn the ordinary people against him. I mean, they would be really upset by that...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Are you anti-Rome or aren't you?

DAVE BAST

He's a collaborator. He is like a tax collector. You know, he might as well be a tax collector. If he said to them: Absolutely not. We need to resist the Romans; well, all they have to do is go straight to Pilate and say: You know what this guy just said?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, treason.

DAVE BAST

So, yes; it seems like he is on the horns of a dilemma. He doesn't have an answer one way or the other; but in his masterful way...like you said, Scott, don't play word games with the Word made flesh because he is going to outdo you. Show me a coin, he says, and on the coin there is an image, an image of Caesar. That is how coins were made back then. The local ruler or the imperial...the emperor himself would be put on a coin, which incidentally is why those coins had to be changed before you could pay your Temple tax because they would not accept a coin with an image on it in the Temple.

SCOTT HOEZEE

A lot of archeology suggests...now, I cannot be one hundred percent certain that that was true of this denarius coin that they brought Jesus, but probably...a lot of the coins in the Roman empire that bore the image of the Caesar also had the Latin inscription: *deus et dominus*—god and lord; and so these coins were also blasphemous because to anybody who believes in God, the emperor—the Caesars—claiming to be god and lord is a blasphemous claim. You would think that, as the holy Son of God, that coin would burn Jesus. It would be like kryptonite to Superman or something because it is such rank heresy; but Jesus isn't bothered by that. Instead, he undermines...without saying it, right? He undermines that claim by saying: Look, Caesar wants his coin, give it to him. It is his coin. His picture is on it. Give it to him. And give to God what is God's, which was Jesus' subtle way of saying Caesar can call himself god and lord, but he is not.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

If you know who the true God is, honor him in your life, and give Caesar his money. Who cares? So, Jesus cuts right through their trap. He does not say anything that can get him in trouble with the Jews; he does not say anything that is overt enough to get him in trouble with Pontius Pilate or the Roman authorities; and he keeps God, God. It is brilliant!

DAVE BAST

It is. I like the last line of this incident: And they were amazed at him...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

Mark says; and we are still amazed at the wisdom of this answer, and the depth of it—the profundity of it. I mean, because Jesus essentially has invited his followers for the last two thousand years to ponder within themselves, and debate among themselves what things are Caesar's and what things are God's. How far do we go in support of human government? Surely there are some legitimate claims that our governments have upon us; that is what it means to live in society; but there are other things that we cannot give to our government or to any human being because they belong to God alone...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

You think of the apostles in the early Church: We must obey God rather than men, as they said. So, Christians...and Jesus does not answer that question for us. He does not tell us which things are Caesar's and which things are God's. He wants us to wrestle with that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; because the kingdoms of this world always want our ultimate allegiance, and Jesus is as much as saying here they cannot have it; and you have known that all along, Israel. You were carved out of the nations to be a distinct place that will eventually bless all nations; and so Jesus is getting at ultimate things here...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The question was meant just to trip him up. He ends up...we are calling this series the last teachings of Jesus...he ends up making a very significant teaching here; and you know, we have referred already in this program to how Jesus is the Word made flesh, but the New Testament also tells us...and we did a brief series on this on *Groundwork* recently...he is also wisdom incarnate...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is the wisdom of God, and wisdom is knowing the difference between this and that, and being able to be discerning...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Jesus is the ultimate discerning one; and that is what we see here. So, they did not get him on their gotcha question; he got them; but they are not done either. There is at least one other gotcha question that we will look at next.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, let's go right on reading now into Mark Chapter 12.

DAVE BAST

Right; here is another of the gotcha questions that we are talking about in this program; part of a series on Jesus' last teachings.

¹⁸So then the Sadducees (and here is a third group; we have seen the Pharisees, the Herodians, now the Sadducees) who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. ¹⁹“Teacher,” they said, “Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. ²⁰Now, there were seven brothers. The first one married and died without leaving any children. ²¹The second one married the widow, but he also died leaving no child. It was the same with the third. ²²In fact, none of the seven left any children. Last of all, the woman died, too. ²³At the resurrection, whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?”

SCOTT HOEZEE

²⁴Jesus replied, “Are you not in error because you do not know the scriptures or the power of God? ²⁵When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage. They will be like the angels in heaven. ²⁶Now about the dead rising, have you not read in the book of Moses and the account of the burning bush how God said to him, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ ²⁷He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken.”

So, that was Jesus' reply. Of course, after that ridiculous story about seven brothers dying...you know, going down like dominoes, you expect Jesus to say: Give me a break!

DAVE BAST

And they are all infertile? I mean, what is going on? Or maybe the problem was with the wife?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, who knows? It is a fanciful story...

DAVE BAST

It is a ridiculous story, right...

SCOTT HOEZEE

A ridiculous story.

DAVE BAST

And meant to be.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Reductio ad absurdum in Latin...a reduction to the level of the absurd. They are really going for broke. It is like a baseball game here. Jesus struck out the first two batters, now the Sadducees are the third batter and he is going to strike them out, too; end of the inning. So, they do not believe in the resurrection—the Sadducees—they thought...maybe they had some Greek influences, because the Greeks did not want our bodies to rise again. So, they are telling a story that they do not even believe themselves.

DAVE BAST

And so, it is more hypocrisy; and again, a blatant effort to trip Jesus up by making the idea of resurrection seem so ridiculous.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; this is not a workable proposal, is what they are saying.

DAVE BAST

Right; they were also very conservative in a way—the Sadducees. They tended to control the Temple, and they only accepted the Torah as scripture—the first five books of Moses. So they rejected the Prophets and the writings—the rest of the Bible as being somehow inferior; and it is really in the later parts of the Bible that the idea of resurrection begins to come.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; some hints in Daniel and elsewhere in the Old Testament, but...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The idea that we will be embodied, as Jesus was embodied after his own resurrection. He is the firstfruits, as Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15. Jesus now has a "psychical"* body...a resurrection body...and we will, too. So we know we will really be embodied, and so forth. So, their attempt to undermine the resurrection here is silly, and Jesus says it is also silly because why would you assume the world to come is going to be just like this one?

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

How do you know that marriage will mean there what it means here?

DAVE BAST

Exactly, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It won't. I think there is one possible danger in this passage. So, Jesus is answering an absurd scenario, and he is answering it in a way to undercut them. Probably we would be over-interpreting this if we think we can get out of this passage all kinds of things about sexuality or our embodiment or gender in the new creation. That is not Jesus' point here.

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He is not trying to give us blueprints for what our new bodies will be like; only to say, you are just assuming that the next world is a continuation of this one without interruption, and that is wrong. If you know the Bible, that is wrong.

DAVE BAST

Well, and furthermore, he knows more about it than they do...

SCOTT HOEZEE

I would think.

DAVE BAST

So, I think part of what he is saying is: You do not understand what it is going to be like; so do not start to draw conclusions...as you just said, Scott, do not draw specific conclusions. The key in his response is not so much what he says about marriage in the world to come, or lack thereof; it is the way he quotes from the Torah...from the Bible that they accepted...to prove the fact that those who live in God in this life will live in God forever...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

That they do not die. They do not simply cease to be.

SCOTT HOEZEE

He quotes what God says to Moses out of the burning bush: I *am* the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob. Now, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are all dead by human standards; but what Jesus is saying here is they are still alive to God...

DAVE BAST

Absolutely.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are all alive to God if we are believers. There is no such thing as seven dead brothers, and so forth. They are alive somehow, and it is not going to be a problem. It is going to be a glorious thing.

DAVE BAST

It is the present tense, that is the key. He does not say: I used to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob... I *am*...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, I remember them, yes.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The way Jesus spins that...the way Jesus interprets that fairly well-known line from the burning bush is rather unexpected. Probably nobody had ever quite read it that way before; but Jesus is the authorized interpreter of scripture, being the Word of God made flesh, so we know he has it right. Do not make the resurrection a problem. It is a glorious reality. We are all still alive in God and we will be alive in new bodies in the kingdom of God. Do not sweat the details. Do not expect me to enter into your fanciful scenarios. This is good news—this is Gospel, not a problem. So believe the Gospel.

DAVE BAST

And here is the Gospel put in wonderful form by Jesus at the conclusion here: He is not the God of the dead; he is the God of the living. If God is your God, you are alive, and you always will be. Death no longer has any hold over you. As Jesus himself said to Mary and Martha: I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Praise God, that is good news.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thanks be to God.

DAVE BAST

Well thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we reexamine the meaning of Jesus' story about the widow's mite.

Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to let us know what scripture passages or topics you would like to hear discussed on *Groundwork*.

*Note: "Psychical" is a word Paul coined when he used it in 1 Corinthians 15 to describe Jesus' resurrection body; it is a real body, but also a spiritual body. The Greek word for "spiritual" is literally "psychical."

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