

Jesus' Authority Questioned

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 May 2024

Preacher: Nathan Rambeck

[0 : 0 0] our study on Mark. We're in Mark chapter 11. We're in the last passage. So if you got a Bible, open it up to Mark chapter 11. And when we started chapter 11 here, we started into the last, oh, I'm getting a signal.

I always forget this, don't I? Tell you what, let's do it at the end. Will somebody remind me? Somebody, all right, I've got a few. Remind me at the end, we'll do our memory verse that I always forget.

But we're in chapter 11, chapter 11 and the whole rest of the gospel of Mark takes the span of one week. Now, the whole of Mark, except for the very beginning, the birth of Jesus, but the vast majority of Mark is just the three-year ministry of Jesus.

It takes place over three years. And in chapter 11, through the end, a whole five chapters, which is about a third of the gospel, takes place over the last week. Sometimes we call it the Passion Week of Jesus.

We already read how he entered into Jerusalem. He spent most of his ministry up north in Israel, and now he's gone down to Jerusalem. This is the center of Jewish life. This is where the temple is, which is the very center of the religious life of the Jews.

[1 : 2 2] And he had this, what they call the triumphal entry. You know, it didn't seem very triumphal. He didn't come in on a chariot and a horse. This is the king of the Jews.

He's the one who the prophets have said will reign in Jerusalem on a throne, not only ruling over Israel, but ruling over the entire earth, according to the prophets.

And he is the king that has been prophesied. But he comes in in a strange way, lowly on a donkey, not on a horse with chariots.

He comes with an entourage of kind of country folk, you know, not soldiers and all the pomp and circumstance that comes with that. And then he comes in, and the next day he goes back into Jerusalem and comes into the temple, this huge courtyard where the temple, the temple building itself is fairly small, but the temple, we call it today the Temple Mount.

It's this whole like plateau where this temple, or it was originally built. It was, it's been destroyed, was destroyed actually about a generation or less than a generation after, after the time of Jesus in 70 AD.

[2 : 4 0] But there was a courtyard the size of multiple football fields. And Jesus came into that courtyard, and he was very upset about what he saw happening there, with basically turning the religious faith of Israel into a profitable business.

And so he overturns tables and seats and is pretty upset. But today, we're looking at a confrontation that the leaders of the time, and we'll talk about those leaders in a second, they have with Jesus.

And basically they're asking him, what gives you the right to do what you're doing here? I mean, you just come in and you act like you own the place. And so there's this confrontation.

In the bulletin, it actually says we're going to go into chapter 12. After I spent some time on this, we're just going to basically go here to the end of chapter 11.

So here's what we're going to do, like we do every week. We're just going to read through the passage, and then we're going to go verse by verse and talk through it. So Mark chapter 11 and verse 27.

[3 : 54] Then they came again to Jerusalem, and as he was walking in the temple, the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders, they came to him. And they said to him, by what authority are you doing these things?

And who gave you this authority to do these things? But Jesus answered and said to them, I also will ask you one question. Then answer me, and I will tell you by what authority I do these things.

The baptism of John, was it from heaven or from men? Answer me. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, if we say from heaven, he will say, why then did you not believe him?

But if we say from men, they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed. So they answered and they said to Jesus, we do not know.

And Jesus answered and said to them, neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. Wow, seems kind of rude, huh? Well, let's talk about it.

[5 : 04] So Jesus is, this is his third day. I think this is a Tuesday. Jesus comes in as triumphal entry on a Sunday. The next day he comes in, that's when he flips all the tables in the temple in the courtyard.

And then this is the next day. And he comes back into the temple. And he has this confrontation here. And going back to verse 27, it says this, Then they came again to Jerusalem.

And as he was walking in the temple, the chief priest, and I'm sure, right, at this time, everybody knows this guy, Jesus. Lots of people have heard of him, right? This is the guy doing miracles up in Galilee and all around, at times in Judea, occasionally, but mostly up in Galilee.

And he's been teaching. And there's a lot of rumors that this might be the Messiah. But some people may have never heard of him. But by this time, everybody knew who this guy was. He came in and made this huge ruckus there in the temple courtyard.

And this is the time when most Jews, many Jews, come to the temple to celebrate what they called the festival of Passover, to commemorate the Passover lamb that was killed when they were, during the time that they were delivered from Egypt, from Pharaoh.

[6 : 21] And the death angel came over each house. And those who put the blood of the lamb over their doorposts, they were saved from that last of the ten plagues.

So they came again to Jerusalem. And he was walking in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the elders, they came to him. So first question, who are we talking about? Who are these three different groups of people?

Well, this is a description of what we call today, and this is a transliteration. So this is actually a Greek word that we just turn into an English word.

It's called the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin. Some Bibles may actually use that word. A lot of times you'll see it translated as a council or something similar to that.

So Sanhedrin is this group of people. The word Sanhedrin actually literally means the seat of the sun. The seat of the sun. So it's a seat of authority.

[7 : 25] And the Sanhedrin was this council that ruled at the time over all of Jewish life. Both religious life and to some extent also the civil life.

Think of them as not just the religious leaders, but also kind of the government of Israel to a certain extent. Not completely because who was really in charge?

It was Rome at the time. So Rome allowed, and this was actually common for the Romans to do when they conquered a people group. Unlike some of the other conquerors, instead of just taking over and changing the culture and everything, Rome, it was actually pretty wise.

Because they wanted to maintain some kind of culture of that area. And so they would allow people to continue their traditions and their religion. And they would even install some kind of leader who was under their authority, and they made sure of that, but who was someone of the people.

So at this time there was Herod, one of the Herods. As we've talked before, there were many Herods over the years. But Herod was the king, and he was allowed to rule, but he ruled under their auspices, under their authority.

[8 : 37] He wasn't allowed to just do whatever he wanted. And the same with this council. This council ruled over primarily the religious life, but they also had legislative authority as well to a certain extent.

There was a council of 71 men, and this was something that kind of came about during the time of the exile.

So Israel originally, well, you started with the judges, and then eventually you had the kings. So it was a monarchy, the Jewish monarchy. But then the Babylonians came in, and they conquered Israel, and took most of the people captive back to Babylon.

And then eventually there was a release of that captivity, and they were allowed to go back and establish some kind of semblance of life back then, but again, under a foreign rule.

Under the Persians, they were actually given quite a bit of leeway to basically have their own government. And so this council of Jewish leaders formed that ruled over.

[9 : 48] They didn't have a king, at least at that time, but they started with elders, and elders were just kind of tribal leaders, leaders of large groups of people.

And so the elders of the different tribes or larger families would get together, and they formed this council. When they ruled under the authority of the Persians, they actually had quite a bit of leeway, like I said, but when the Romans took over, after the Persians, when the Romans were in charge, they actually took away quite a bit of their legislative power.

In fact, one of the things that they were not allowed to do, for the most part, was execute criminals. And that's why, as we'll see later on, when they really wanted to kill Jesus, but they didn't have the authority to do that on their own.

They actually had to go to Pilate. Pilate was the one who had to give the okay. He had to rubber stamp their request to kill Jesus. Pilate was the one who had to give the right.

This council actually operated primarily here in Judea, in Jerusalem, but they had a little bit of authority out in other parts of Israel, specifically up in Galilee.

[11 : 06] So we see different references when Jesus was in Galilee to scribes, to Pharisees, and these are all part of the system that's down here in Israel.

So what are these three groups? Well, it mentions chief priests. Now, a priest was actually a role designated by the Old Testament law, by the law of Moses. There was a priesthood, and they had specific roles that they had.

And so as part of this Jewish council, there were a series of priests. Now, there were many chief priests, but there was only one high priest.

And so you had chief priests, those who were kind of in charge. You had lower levels of priests who served in the temple, but you had the chief priests who were part of this council, and then you had the high priest who was really actually kind of the president of the whole council.

And during this time, and we will read about him later as we look into this trial of Jesus, his name was Caiaphas, the high priest at the time. And the high priest, they were really in charge of the temple.

[12 : 11] That was their job, to rule over the temple and what needed to happen. The sacrificial system, the money that comes into the temple. They were in charge of all those things.

And then you have the elders, and elders, again, was just people who were really, we think of them, I think today we would call them maybe nobles, or the aristocracy.

They were usually wealthy people who had a lot of money and power, and could, you know, get a seat at the table of this council. They weren't necessarily religious in nature, though at this time especially, and this has really been the way it is in most of the history of the world, there wasn't a separation like we have today between religion and government.

Back then, it was kind of intertwined, just like it was during the time of the monarchy of Israel. There was a tight link between religion and government.

The Romans kind of made more of a separation, but still there was this aristocracy that was involved in the civil life of the Jew, but as well as the religious life.

[13 : 23] There was one famous elder of this council. His name was Joseph of Arimathea. If you remember, this is the one who offered to give his tomb to Jesus when he was crucified.

So a very wealthy man, he had the resources to build his own tomb in the city, very expensive land, and he was called an elder of the council.

And then the last group here, the scribes, and the scribes were, we think of them today like the theologians. They were the Bible teachers, the ones who studied the scriptures, specifically the law of Moses, in order to be able to teach the people how they ought to live.

And that was an important role in something in Jewish life, that people would know how they ought to live. There were two other groups that were really crossed over, really categories, when it comes to the scribes and the elders, and maybe even the chief priests, or any of the priests.

There was like a, there was like two political parties, that's I think the best way to think of them. You have the Sadducees and the Pharisees. And typically we think of the Sadducees as the more kind of liberal group, and then the Pharisees was the more conservative group.

[14 : 39] So you can think about it today in America, we have like the liberal Democrats, and then the conservative Republicans, and that's kind of how it was with the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

The Sadducees were a little bit more loose with the Bible, with the scriptures, right? They were willing to make more of it, more metaphorical. You think about that way with the Democrats today in our constitution, and oh, it's just kind of more of a suggestion, or what do they say?

What's the phrase that they use? It's a living document. You know, the constitution is a living document. You kind of take it with a grain of salt. Whereas conservatives or Republicans are more like, no, we need to stick with the letter of the constitution and what it actually says.

And so that's how it was here among the Sadducees and the Pharisees as well. So there's this confrontation with this group, these leaders.

They're the ones who are in charge of the temple. And so they've got this question for Jesus, and they say in verse 28, they said to him, but by what authority are you doing these things? And who gave you this authority to do these things?

[15 : 47] They're asking about authority. Hey, we're the ones in charge. What do you think you're doing? Who gave you the right to come in here and act like you own the place? And do they really know who they're talking to?

Not really, even though they should, and we'll get to that in a second. But they're asking, you know, who gave you this authority? Was there somebody among our group that gave you some kind of right?

And I don't think that they had any idea. In fact, this question, I think we can assume, is not a genuine question.

It's not a question motivated by curiosity. It's a question intended to find some kind of accusation to accuse Jesus of.

They're looking for, just like they have before, and we've read before, as we've gone through Mark, that very early on in Jesus' ministry, they sought an opportunity to destroy him because they didn't like what he was doing.

[16 : 57] So they were always constantly looking for some excuse, some little thing that we can grab hold of to accuse him and have him put to death.

We'll read here about Jesus' response and how did he respond to this question that I'm sure he recognized as not genuine. But Jesus answered and said to them, I also will ask you one question, then answer me, and I'll tell you by what authority I do these things.

It's like I'll make you a deal. I got a question for you. And if you answer me that question, then I'll answer yours. And so, you know, it can be at times, right, rude.

If somebody asks you a question, and we see this a lot with politicians, right? You got especially, or what do you call the lady now who does the questions for the press, the press secretary, right?

And if you get a question that you don't, really don't want to answer, right, you obfuscate in some way. You talk about something else, or sometimes, you know, you can just ask your own question and just avoid answering it.

[18 : 10] So Jesus is avoiding answering this question. We'll talk in a second about why. But sometimes it can be wise when you're having a discussion with somebody, a debate, a conflict, to ask questions.

Really, here's what Jesus' strategy is. And we've talked about this a little bit, but during his three-year ministry, Jesus is really kind of managing the conflict that is brewing here with the leaders of Israel.

He knows, he has a plan. He knows at the very end of this three years, he's going to be killed. That is part of the plan. It wasn't something that was a surprise to Jesus at the end.

In fact, we read three times, he tells his own disciples, I'm going to die. We're going to go down to Jerusalem, and I'm going to be killed. And I want you to know beforehand. But, and we see that he went into the temple, and he's upending tables, and really generating more conflict.

But at this time, he's still got a few days left. You know that Jesus wants, he needs to die on a specific day. A very specific day.

[19 : 29] This is, this is the time of the Passover. And there's a specific day in which the Passover lamb is killed, and he has this plan to die on that very specific day.

And the symbolism is, is tremendous. It's amazing. And so he's still managing this conflict. He's, he's, he's ratcheting things up, but at the same time, he doesn't want to give them something to accuse him.

Not quite yet. But we'll actually see later on, in a, in a few days, he answers their question very, very directly.

And it, and they just go berserk. And they say, see, see what he claims to be. And they use that as an opportunity to crucify him.

But that time isn't quite yet. It's still just a few days away. So, they ask him a question about where he gets his authority, and he's going to respond with a different question.

[20 : 32] He's going to avoid answering the question. So that he can't give them anything solid to accuse him of. Now, one of the other things that you can do when you ask, when you respond to a question with a question, is it's an opportunity to reframe an argument.

You see this a lot of time with debates. And people will frame a question in a way that is, and, and this is all, this is when you, if you've ever studied debate, you know that whoever frames the argument is usually the one who wins.

And so, you want to be the one that frames the argument in the right way. And that is important. That you, really, and that's all about worldview. How you see things. We ought to see things from the right perspective.

And if you're looking from the wrong perspective, you're going to get the wrong answers. There's a story from a guy I came across, Mike Winger.

Mike Winger actually is a really neat Bible teacher. He's got millions of views on YouTube. And, in fact, if you're looking for good Bible teaching, I would actually highly recommend him.

[21 : 42] He's, he's very careful with the scriptures and does a great job. But he told this story. He said he was actually preaching at a, a public high school. And, while he was there, he was trying to have some interaction with the students.

Not just kind of lecturing or just having people listen. But he was asking for questions. And he said, whoever has the best question, I'll give you ten bucks. And so, there was this young lady.

And she says, well, I got a question for you. Why does God, why does Jesus hate gay people? He's like, okay, that's a really good question. You get the ten bucks. But, he described how, he used that opportunity because, how does that frame things, right?

That frames God, Jesus, as being a hater of men. And this is actually a common thing in the culture, right, today. This is something you'll find on one of the talk shows or whatever.

If they have a Christian on, they're going to ask something similar because they want to frame Christians as haters because they uphold a certain moral standard for sexual morality.

[22 : 58] But here, here was his response. He, he asked, he said, can I ask you a question? Would you ever die for someone that you hated?

would you ever die for someone that you hated? And she had to respond and say, well no, I would never die for somebody that I hated.

But that answers the question, isn't it? Jesus died for who? Is it just for the straight people? Is it just for the good people? Is it just for the people who do everything right?

Is it just for the clean people? No, Christ died for the ungodly, and for sinners. Jesus loves everybody. That doesn't mean that there is no standard.

There is a standard. But that question really brought out the deficit in her own question. Another example, and I've used this at times in talking to people about Christianity, about the gospel.

[24 : 01] And a lot of time when you're talking to people about the gospel, bringing up sin is important because that's, the gospel is the answer to sin. And so if you can't show the disease, right, if you can't convince somebody of the disease, the sickness that they have, you can't really convince them of the cure, which the cross of Christ, Jesus dying on the cross for our sins is the cure that we all need.

But people will ask the question and they'll ask, are you judging me? You bring up something that's a sinful behavior? Are you judging me? You're not supposed to judge.

In fact, there's even a Bible verse, right? And it's amazing how many people who never read the Bible or rarely do, but they know that one Bible verse in Matthew 7, you shall not judge. They don't seem to get past that one verse because if they would just read a few more verses they'd understand what that's talking about.

But an easy response is because they're accusing you of something, right? Are you judging me? Are you being judgmental? So you just easily respond and say, well, are you judging me for being judgmental?

Right? Because really, judgment is an important part of living life. If you never make judgments in your life, you're not going to make it very far in life, right?

[25 : 25] We're constantly making judgments and we ought to. We ought to make good judgments, right? and not bad ones. Things about what's the right way we ought to live.

We ought to judge how ought we to live in the right way. So Jesus answers a question with a question and here's the question that he asks.

Verse 30, the baptism of John, was it from heaven or from men? Answer me. And what an important question. John the Baptist, we call him John the Baptist or John the Baptizer, he came before Jesus.

He was actually sent specifically to, what does the Scripture say, to pave the way or make the way before the Lord, before Jesus. And so he came with this new ritual that was kind of new that was kind of new but not totally new because the Jews had all kinds of water rituals in which they would bathe and wash themselves, sometimes sprinkling, sometimes bathing, washing their hands, sometimes their whole bodies, washing utensils and other things.

That was part of the law of Moses. But John came and he was telling people, all of you I want, not just the priests or other special groups, but the whole people of Israel.

[26 : 44] He brought them to the Jordan River, that's where he spent most of his ministry and he said, I want you to come and I want you to be baptized, do this water ritual for the forgiveness of your sins as a sign that you are repenting and turning back to God as the people of God, Israel.

And that was a new thing. That wasn't something that was in the law of Moses, you know, exactly like that anyway, that everybody should go through a water ritual to turn back to God. That was something that was new.

But Jesus, and I didn't write this down, but there's a passage in one of the Gospels where Jesus rebukes the leaders and he says, you rejected the will of God for yourselves, refusing the baptism of John.

You know, many people, in fact, the Bible uses, I think, a figure of speech. It says, all of Israel came to John to be baptized by him. There were tons of people that came to be baptized by him to show their repentance toward God.

But one of the primary ones that refused were these leaders that were confronting Jesus right now. And so, he's asking this question to them because he knows that they rejected the baptism of John and they ask him, was it from men or from heaven?

[28 : 06] Now, verse 31, they understand why Jesus is asking this question. They're saying, well, if we want to get our accusation from him, if we want to get him to answer our question, I guess we've got to answer this one.

And so, they got together and they got into their little football huddle and it says, they reasoned among themselves and they said, all right guys, if we say that John was from heaven, he's going to say, why then didn't you believe him?

Because we didn't get baptized by John. And so, he'll have some kind of accusation against us. He'll call us hypocrites. But if we say from men, well, it says they feared the people.

The people really liked John and they, for the most part, considered John to be a true prophet from God. And so, they said, well, we can't do that. We don't want to upset the people.

So, they just went back to Jesus and said, well, we don't know. So, this is a, two, what do you call it, a, just two options for this question.

[29 : 24] Heaven or for men? Not all questions have just two answers, right? But this one, this one does. And so, really, what is the right question about John's ministry? Is it from heaven or for man?

The right answer is from heaven. John was sent by God. He was sent as a prophet of God. He was commissioned by the Lord. He was actually a prophet, speaking the words that God gave him and doing the things that God gave him to do.

But they rejected that answer and they considered the question of men. that's the answer they probably wanted to give, right?

But there was one thing that kept him from it. It was fear, fear of man. And really, I think there's kind of two reasons to, to criticize these leaders.

One, because they were, they wanted to give the wrong answer. But two, they feared men, right? When you were, especially when you're a leader, you can't allow the fear of man to determine what you're going to say.

[30 : 32] Especially when you're speaking on God's behalf. You want to speak what the Bible says or what God gave you to speak, regardless of what men say. And is that always easy?

Sometimes that's really, really, really hard to speak the truth when everybody hates the truth. So they had two things against them.

They didn't know right from wrong, really. And they also feared men. So here's what they answered. They said, well, we don't know. Can't really give an answer.

And I think, to at least some degree, they really didn't know. They really didn't know who he was. But they should have.

They should have known who he was. There were actually, and you can go back through the Bible and actually find enough evidence to accuse these men that you should have known.

[31 : 41] You had the knowledge. You just didn't consider it. You weren't willing to consider it. You know, we'll talk about this. We're going to look at a few things here in the Scriptures.

but I think what we're seeing is a willing ignorance. Some people are ignorant not because they just don't have the facts, but because they want to be ignorant.

And that's not just a problem with these folks. This is a problem throughout the world with all of us. There are certain things we just don't want to look into. If we look too hard, we might find something we just don't really want to see.

We don't really want to know that that's bad for us. Just for one kind of simple and less, more trivial example. You ever see something at the store and it looks delicious?

And a lot of times you might look at the back of the box to see what the ingredients are. Right? And then you look and you read all these long chemical names and high fructose corn syrup and all these different things and you're like, eh, I'm putting it back on the shelf.

[32 : 50] I'm not getting that. I'm not putting that in my body. But then you see something that looks really good. And you're like, I'm not looking at the ingredients list. I'm just putting it in my cart. Right? And so, you know, that's more trivial and most of the time that's fine.

But it's just an example of times where we just don't want to know what the truth is. We're willingly ignorant. But these leaders, they had the knowledge put right in front of them.

In fact, if we go back to the very beginning when Jesus was born, there were these three, we call them the three wise men. We don't know how many there were. These wise men, these men from the east and they came out and saw this star and they were somewhat of guys who looked up into the heavens and tried to find things.

We really don't know a lot about them. But they actually came to Jerusalem and they came to Herod and they said, hey, we're looking for the star of the Messiah. Do you know anything about the Messiah?

And if you actually turn to Matthew chapter 22, or chapter 2, Matthew chapter 2, verse 1. Matthew chapter 2, verse 1, it says this, Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men came, or from the east, came to Jerusalem saying, where is he who has been born king of the Jews?

[34 : 11] For we have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him. When Herod the king heard this, so they were asking around and Herod, they were asking around all over town and Herod got wind of it.

King of the Jews, what? I'm the king of the Jews. For we have seen his star in the east and have come to worship him. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him. This is not something that was done in secret.

All of Jerusalem knew what these guys were doing. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and the scribes, Herod got together people from this council, this Sanhedrin, the chief priests and scribes.

And he inquired of them, where the Christ, that is the Messiah, was to be born. And so they said to him, well in Bethlehem of Judah, for thus it is written by the prophet, but you Bethlehem in the land of Judah are not the least among the rulers of Judah, for out of you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

These guys knew the scriptures. They knew what the prophets said. They had an answer right at hand. Oh, the Messiah, he's supposed to be born in Bethlehem. That's what the scriptures said. That's what the prophets said.

[35 : 22] They knew the scriptures. And this is just one of many that Jesus fulfilled. And they saw it over and over again. They had the information right at their fingertips.

And then there were the miracles. In fact, there was a certain Pharisee who was a ruler of the Jews.

It's not quite clear whether he was part of this council. but he was he was a big shot. And this is the famous passage in John chapter 3 where Jesus where it says that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.

But this is Nicodemus and it says in John chapter 3 verse 1 there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to him Rabbi teacher we notice how he says we not me we know we know what?

We know that you are a teacher come from man. We know that you're a teacher come from God. We know that you were sent from heaven. Now whether he's a prophet or what the Messiah maybe it's not clear but we know that you're not somebody who just came up with your own ideas here.

[36 : 48] And he says why? For no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him. And Jesus himself said hey don't believe me just because of my word.

Jesus himself said that. He said just because I say something you shouldn't believe me. He said but look at two other things. The scriptures that testify of me and two the miracles that I do. They are a witness to me.

And that's what the Old Testament law says. Don't believe any word unless there are two or three witnesses. Two or three witnesses. There were lots of witnesses to who Jesus was whether he was from men or from heaven.

So in a certain sense they didn't know but not because they investigated and they considered carefully and they just came up empty handed. It's because they were willingly ignorant and they did not want to know.

Because the answer or at least one of the answers was too risky. It's too much of a risk to their power that they held sway over the people of Israel to their authority.

[37 : 56] You know today in our world you know we don't in this setting it's more of a religious setting so these are all people who are believers in God and so really the conflict is around who's the Messiah and what authority do people have and repentance and righteousness and justice among in Israel.

But today kind of in our context we have just people who you know are atheistic or agnostic people who are secular not really interested in religious things maybe and so I think this kind of thing comes into play when it just comes to the Christian faith in general.

You know there are actually very few atheists out in the world. I think it's less than 1% of people would claim to be an atheist. An atheist is somebody who has determined that there is no God.

But there are far more of those who whether they call themselves or not would be considered agnostic. And agnostic is just a word that means it's A which means not and agnostic which just means knowledge.

I don't know. So an agnostic is somebody who would answer religious questions or spiritual questions the same way here that these men did.

[39 : 13] I don't know. But what does the Bible say about should we know? In Romans chapter 1 verse 20 and we actually spent some time on that this morning in Sunday school class.

Paul says this. Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles so he spent the bulk of his ministry to pagans, to people who were not Israelites.

They didn't worship the one God. Many of them worship false gods and some of them didn't worship anything. Many of them, and I would say most, did worship false gods, idols.

But Paul says this, for since the creation of the world, God's invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.

Because although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts and their foolish hearts were darkened.

[40 : 29] So their hearts were darkened. There was an ignorance there, but they had the information right at their hands. Did anybody see those northern lights the other night? We missed it.

So disappointed. But you look up into the sky, I saw pictures on social media. It's incredible. I can't even imagine what it would look like in person. But you look up and you see those northern lights and like, again, another scripture we looked at this morning.

What does the psalmist say I think it is? The heavens declare the glory of God. And you look around you and you see a lot of things that certainly look like they're designed.

Somebody designed them. Somebody intelligent. Somebody good. Somebody who appreciates beauty. maybe it was just some cosmic accident.

All that beauty. Although they knew God, they did not glorify him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts and their foolish hearts were darkened.

[41 : 40] And you reject truth long enough, you become, your heart becomes dark, your mind becomes dark. It's hard to see things that might have before been more clear.

Back to the scripture. Jesus gets this response, we don't know. And how does Jesus respond to that? Just like he said, neither will I tell you, neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.

And so, this is one of the few times in all the gospels, in fact, this is the only time I could really think of. I looked around to see if I could find any more. This is the only time where Jesus explicitly refused to answer a question.

Now, there are other times, in fact, later on where he's silent, he's asked questions, but he just remains silent. But here, he says, I'm not going to answer your question. And is this an important question?

about where his authority is from? I mean, the whole idea is he's the Messiah, and people need to receive him as Messiah. So, if you don't know that he's been sent from heaven, you can't receive him as Messiah.

[43 : 00] This is an important question. In fact, it has eternal consequences. I'm not going to tell you where I'm from or who I am. Jesus said, during some of his teaching during his three-year ministry, he says this kind of cryptic phrase.

I don't know if it's cryptic, but he told parables, and this is more of like a proverb. Matthew 7, 6, he says, do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn and tear you into pieces.

And boy, is that relevant in this case. They're looking for just that little ammunition, and we're going to tear you into pieces, Jesus. He's like, no, I'm keeping my pearls with me.

I'm not going to answer your question. Now later, he's going to be ready to be torn into pieces, and he will be. And he'll answer their question straight to their face and right to their nose, but not quite yet.

it's interesting in how Jesus is kind of managing this whole conflict in just the next passage. We're going to talk about it next week. Jesus tells a parable, a story, and it's about a vine dresser or a guy who owns a vineyard, and he hires out his vineyard to some vine dressers, and then he sends people to check on it, and they're persecuted and thrown abused, and then finally he sends his son.

[44 : 37] Basically, he answers their question in this story that he tells, but he answers it in a way that really there's not enough to grab hold of, you know, to make a case in court, but he's answering their question, just not directly.

In Mark chapter 14, this is where Jesus is on trial. the high priest, the high priest asks him this question, he says, are you the Christ, the son of the blessed, and Jesus said, I am.

This is really one of the only times, except for with his own disciples, where he explicitly declares who he is, and that's when the gig is up, that's when his ministry comes to a head, a conclusion, at his trial.

But for now, he's just managing the conflict and the tension. It's almost time, but not quite there. You know, in general, when we are communicating with those, especially unbelievers, we should be clear, we should answer questions and communicate clearly when people do have questions about their faith.

1 Peter chapter 3 verse 15 says this, but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and with fear.

[46 : 23] We should always be ready to answer anyone's questions. Anyone who is really searching for God and wants to know about, is God real? What about Jesus?

Was he real? Did he really rise from the dead? Was he really from God? Did he really rise from the dead? Did he really die for my sins?

Could that possibly be? We should be ready with reasons why they should believe and the Bible has many and nature provides us with many things we can look at and point to the evidence for God?

But sometimes it's appropriate. I was just going to give two examples. One thing that I saw on television many years ago and one that I've used in the past.

There was when I was about 18, I think my last year of high school, I was watching Christian television. You know, Christian television can be a mix of, you know, kind of good and bad, right?

[47 : 25] There was this guy and it was kind of like a late night talk show. And so, but it was a call-in show and it was this guy and he was a Christian and he would mostly talk about biblical worldview stuff, political things and things like that.

But also about, you know, the need to receive the gospel. And he would have people call in and they would debate about, you know, religious things or political things or whatever it was, worldview, cultural things.

But he had this guy call in and the guy says, hey, you know, I've been looking into Christianity and I'm really interested and I was wondering if you could just tell me how I could become a Christian.

And I was like, I have never seen this before on Christian television where somebody is like calling in and he's asking somebody, how do I become a Christian?

And the guy, the host, said, no, I'm not going to tell you how to become a Christian. And my eyes just like bulged out of my head. What in the world? How many people get a chance somebody comes to you, how do I become a Christian?

[48 : 34] Usually you have to kind of try to start a conversation and get people to think about spiritual things because most people, you know, they've got their own life that they want to live and they're not really, you know, bringing things like that up often.

And so I'm just bewildered. Why is this guy, what a rude, mean, nasty thing to do. And they continued to talk and over, you know, several minutes kind of comes out, this guy was just looking for an opportunity to mock Christianity and to mock Christians.

And I was like, how did he know that? Well, you know, when you're kind of in that battle on a regular basis, you kind of get a sixth sense, if you will.

If you've ever seen any of these things, you sometimes find them on YouTube, right, where somebody goes to a college campus, a Christian, and they take questions from the audience. And, you know, some people are pretty combative.

Some people have very genuine questions, and others, you can tell their questions are not genuine at all. And so when you do that on a regular basis, you get this kind of sixth sense for who's really serious, or who's just trying to mock or ridicule.

[49 : 46] There, just one other example of this, sometimes in sharing the gospel with others, like I said, it's important that people know that the gospel is a cure for a problem that is sin.

And so a lot of times in sharing the gospel with people, I'll take the opportunity to just bring up something like the Ten Commandments. A lot of people have heard of the Ten Commandments. I'll ask them, do you know any of them?

Sometimes they might know one or two, sometimes they don't know any. I've even had people give me the Bill of Rights before, instead of the Ten Commandments. And I'll ask them, have you ever broken any of the Ten Commandments?

You shall not steal. Have you ever stolen anything? You shall not bear false witness, lie to others for your own benefit. And most people, I mean 99%, yeah, you know, usually we try to minimize our own sin, right?

Yeah, but everybody does that, or it was a little lie, or, you know, I just stole a little thing, you know. People try to minimize, but usually people are fairly honest. But there have been just a handful of times over the years where I've talked to somebody, no, I've never stolen anything.

[50 : 57] No, I've never lied. I've never committed adultery. people are guilty. And so, in those cases, I've taken occasion a couple of times to say, okay, well, it sounds like you don't need what God has to offer.

And so, you are a good person. And so, Jesus did not die for good people. the Bible says that Christ died for who? For the ungodly and for sinners.

That's who Christ died for. And so, his message of salvation is not for you. And I'll just walk away. And with a hope, right, that that might get them to consider, people know, we each know more than anybody around us what's in our own heart, right?

What we've done, right or wrong. And so, hoping that, you know, maybe that refusal to answer the question, to provide the answer that they need, maybe put a little pebble in their shoe to think about, maybe this is something that I really do need.

We'll finish up there, and let's end in a word of prayer. Father, we thank you for your word, and I pray that the things that we discussed today, the attitude of these Jewish leaders that had really a wrong motivation, a fear of man that we don't want to have, but also this willing ignorance.

[52 : 45] We can all be susceptible, even those of us who trust in you and love you, we could be willingly ignorant about things that we ought not to be. I ask that you would help us to search our own hearts and look for those kinds of things, even though we're Christians and we're saved and we know you and we love you, there are certain things, maybe ways that we're living our life that maybe are not honoring to you, and we don't really want to look into those scriptures that might speak to those things, because we're enjoying things that maybe we ought not to be enjoying.

We thank you for your word, that it searches us out, and I pray that we would grow in our love for you, and that all the things that we would do in our lives would not be because we are afraid of or fear of punishment, because you've taken those things out of the way, that we can just trust in you and love you and grow to be more like you, to be godly, to be more like Christ through our relationship with you, because of all that you've accomplished for us.

I thank you for those things. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.