

14. Challenging God?

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People love to challenge something they were told "CAN-NOT-BE-DONE." I believe that it is in our nature. Challenge can be good when it comes to excel in making ourselves or our work better. But it can be pure stupidity and flat out dangerous to our lives to challenge something or someone that should not be challenged.

To name a few:

1) Challenging to climb up to Mount Everest which stands 29,028 feet in Nepal and China without proper equipment, such as oxygen mask, rope and insulated clothing is dumb. You can try to climb up that mountain in your Hawaiian shirt and Bermuda shorts, but you will find out what is like to be frozen solid in a matter of a few hours.

2) Challenging gravity without any equipment, such as airplane, hot air balloon or hang glider is dumber. You step off a cliff or tall building against gravity, you will find out what is like to meet the ground at the falling speed of 250 ft. per second.

3) Challenging against God's authority is dumbest. Many people do this without even realizing what they are doing it. Because of their own pride, they challenge God and even throw their puny fists at Him. Or somehow they are thinking that if they just ignore God's existence, He would disappear. They also think that God is some sort of wimp who cannot stand up for Himself, because our God is full of mercy and patiently wait for people to repent. Let me put it in one sentence: Challenging our God is worse than trying to break a gigantic boulder with an egg.

This morning we are going to see the religious leaders of Israel challenge against the authority of Jesus who is God Himself, because they thought that they could trap Him or subdue Him. I say, "Fat chance!"

Jesus answered four questions from the religious leaders, and then He asked them a question that silenced them for good.

A. A CHALLENGE AGAINST HIS AUTHORITY

Mark 12:1-12 Then He began to speak to them in parables: "A man planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a place for the wine vat and built a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. 2 Now at vintage-time he sent a servant to the vinedressers, that he might receive some of the fruit of the vineyard from the vinedressers. 3 And they took him and beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 4 Again he sent them another servant, and at him they threw stones, wounded him in the head, and sent him away shamefully treated. 5 And again he sent another, and him they killed; and many others, beating some and killing some. 6 Therefore still having one son, his beloved, he also sent him to them last, saying, 'They will respect my son.' 7 But those vinedressers said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.' 8 So they took him and killed him and cast him out of the vineyard. 9 Therefore what will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the vinedressers, and give the vineyard to others. 10 Have you not even read this Scripture: 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. 11 This was the Lord's doing, And it is marvelous in our eyes?'" 12 And they sought to lay hands on Him, but feared the multitude, for they knew He had spoken the parable against them. So they left Him and went away.

Obviously the servants whom they killed were the prophets sent by God. The "a man" who had the vineyard is God the Father. The vineyard is the nation Israel. The vinedressers were the religious rulers. Finally, He sent His Son. That, of course, is the Lord Jesus, the beloved Son of the Father.

In order to retain his legal rights to the property, the owner had to receive produce from the tenants. This explains why the tenants refused to give him anything. They wanted to claim the vineyard for themselves. It also explains why the owner continued to send his servants to them. It was purely a matter of authority and ownership.

Because the owner of the vineyard was not present right at the time, the vinedressers doubted and mocked his authority. They would find out soon enough that even though they couldn't see the owner, his authority was still real. When we think God is too distant to really show His authority, we will be proven just as wrong.

I asked you to underline v10. Jesus is often symbolized as a stone or a rock in the Bible.

- 1) He is the Rock of provision that followed Israel in the wilderness in 1 Corinthians 10:4.
- 2) He is the Stone of stumbling in 1 Peter 2:8.
- 3) He is the Stone cut without hands that crushes the kingdoms of this world in Daniel 2:45.
- 4) He is the Rock that He would build His church upon in Matthew 16:18.

The religious leaders reacted to the conviction of the Holy Spirit by rejecting, not by receiving, nor repenting before Him.

B. A CHALLENGE AGAINST OUR RESPONSIBILITY

Mark 12:13-17 Then they sent to Him some of the Pharisees and the Herodians, to catch Him in His words. 14 When they had come, they said to Him, "Teacher, we know that You are true, and care about no one; for You do not regard the person of men, but teach the way of God in truth. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? 15 Shall we pay, or shall we not pay?" But He, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, "Why do you test Me? Bring Me a denarius that I may see it." 16 So they brought it. And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's." 17 And Jesus answered and said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at Him.

Sometimes our enemies flatter us because they want to hurt us. It is a mistake to put too much stock in what others say about us, either good or bad. Benjamin Franklin said, about flattery, "The Devil sweetens poison with honey."

We have to admit that their question was a masterpiece when it comes to trapping someone. The only problem is that that someone happened to be God.

If Jesus had answered them that they were to pay taxes to Caesar, then that would have meant that He put Caesar ahead of Moses and God. And if He said they were not to pay taxes, He would have been guilty of insurrection against Caesar. They thought they had Him cornered. But actually, they would find themselves cornered by Jesus.

has established human government for our good. Even if we cannot respect the people in office, we must respect the office. Yes, I didn't care about the former President of the United States and her deceitful husband. But I have prayed for them.

By the way, if you ever think what America is doing in domestic and foreign policies not good enough for you, just step out of this country and live somewhere else for a while. I guarantee you that you won't find any better country than this.

C. A CHALLENGE AGAINST THE TRUTH OF GOD

Mark 12:18-27 Then some Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him; and they asked Him, saying: 19 "Teacher, Moses wrote to us that if a man's brother dies, and leaves his wife behind, and leaves no children, his brother should take his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. 20 Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife; and dying, he left no offspring. 21 And the second took her, and he died; nor did he leave any offspring. And the third likewise. 22 So the seven had her and left no offspring. Last of all the woman died also. 23 Therefore, in the resurrection, when they rise, whose wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife." 24 Jesus answered and said to them, "Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God? 25 For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 26 But concerning the dead, that they rise, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the burning bush passage, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? 27 He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken."

The Sadducees accepted only the Law of Moses as their religious authority. So, if a doctrine could not be defended from the first five books of the Old Testament, they would not accept it. They did not believe in the existence of the soul, life after death, resurrection, final judgment, angels, or demons. Most of the Sadducees were priests and were wealthy and tended to look down on everybody else.

They brought a hypothetical question to Jesus, based on the law of marriage given in Deuteronomy 25:7-10. This woman had a series of seven husbands during her lifetime, all brothers, and all of whom had died. I think the Israel CSI should investigate the foods she cooked for her seven husbands.

The Sadducees thought that they were smart, but Jesus soon revealed their ignorance in the power of God. Resurrection is not the restoration of life as we know it. It is the entrance into a new life that is different.

The Sadducees were also ignorant of the Scriptures. They claimed to accept the authority of Moses, but they failed to notice that Moses taught the continuation of life after death. Once again, our Lord went back to Scripture, in this case to the passage about the burning bush in Exodus 3. God did not tell Moses that He was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But He said, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." The patriarchs were still alive in spirit when God spoke those words to Moses. In other words, Moses does teach that there is life after death.

D. A CHALLENGE AGAINST THE LAW OF GOD

Mark 12:28-34 Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" 29 Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. 31 And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." 32 So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. 33 And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." 34 Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." But after that no one dared question Him.

The next challenge came from a scribe who was also a Pharisee. The scribes had determined that the Jews were obligated to obey 613 precepts in the Law, 365 negative precepts and 248 positive. One of their favorite exercises was discussing which of these divine commandments was the greatest.

The bottom line of all the laws on earth can be found in the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments can be divided in two: The first four commandments are about our relationship with the Lord and the last six with our neighbors. That is what Jesus summarized to the scribe by quoting from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 & Leviticus 19:18.

E. JESUS' QUESTION TO THE RELIGIOUS RULERS

Mark 12:35-40 Then Jesus answered and said, while He taught in the temple, "How is it that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David? 36 For David himself said by the Holy Spirit: 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" 37 Therefore David himself calls Him 'Lord'; how is He then his Son?" And the common people heard Him gladly. 38 Then He said to them in His teaching, "Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, 39 the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, 40 who devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation."

So far, four groups of the Israeli religious leaders gave their best shots at Jesus. Each intended shot went back at them and defeated them in their own home court Temple Mount. Now it is Jesus' turn to ask a question that completely made them to be speechless and revealed their hypocrisy.

Jesus focused on the most important question of all: "Who is the Messiah?" I said this before and I will say this again for many more times to come. The main difference between Christianity and the cults is the identity of Jesus Christ. The cults do not admit that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the only Savior and God Himself. If we are wrong about Jesus Christ, we are wrong about salvation. This means we end up condemning our own souls.

Jesus was quoting Psalm 110:1 and asked them to explain how the Son of David could be the Lord of David. The only way David's son could also be David's Lord would be if Messiah were God come in human flesh. The answer, of course, is our Lord Jesus' miraculous conception and virgin birth.

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.

Just as these religious leaders manipulated their people to hoard wealth for themselves, we find some of TV preachers in nowadays do the same things. While they wear two thousand dollar custom tailored suits and Italian alligator leather shoes with big fancy rings on their fingers and driving fancy sport cars and living in a big mansion, they beg for more money to the gullible people who have limited incomes. God will deal with them as He dealt with these hypocrites in the past.

F. THE RIGHT MINDSET OF GIVING

Mark 12:41-44 Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many who were rich put in much. 42 Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. 43 So He called His disciples to Himself and said to them, "Assuredly, I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; 44 for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood."

There were thirteen trumpet-shaped chests around the walls of the court of the women, and here the people dropped in their offerings. The rich people made a big show out of their giving, but Jesus rejected them and their gifts. It is not the amount but a sacrificial heart that is important. The rich gave out of their abundance, but the poor widow gave all that she had. She was doing what she was supposed to do in obedience to the Lord.

There are many free loaders in Christianity. They expect other people to pick up the tab in church expenses and supporting missionaries. They miss out great opportunities in participating in the Kingdom work. Don't think that God needs our money to do His work. He is allowing us to be a part of it with His money He shares with us.

When a little girl sees a Salvation Army Kettle in front of a Wal-Mart, her daddy gives her money to put it in there. She could keep it and be selfish or she could put it in and be a part of helper to the poor. Was that her money? No, it was her daddy's money, but she gets to be a part of the channel of blessing.

Just like that, all the money we have belong to God. You may say, "No, I earned it every penny." Not so. God gave you a life to live, heartbeats to continue, a job to earn your living, intelligence to do your work. Our lives are given by Him. He owns everything.

The widow challenges the mindset that says, "I'll give when I have more." Whatever we give sacrificially to God, He sees it and is pleased.

G. APPLICATION

The pride of living and the pride of giving are sins we must avoid at all cost.

How tragic that the leaders depended on a religious system that shortly would pass off the scene! How wonderful that the common people gladly listened to Jesus and obeyed His Word! In which group are you?