

Adult Teaching Resources

October 25, 2020



A Prayer List for Today

Psalm 80:1-19 (RCL 80:7-15)—“Restore Us, Lord”

Psalm 23—“Lead Us, Lord”

Psalm 96:1-13—“Be Honored, Lord”

The Right Stuff

Matthew 22:34-46—“The Right Questions”

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“The Right Questions”

Matthew 22:34-46

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Bible Background

Key Verse: Matthew 22:36—“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?”

Jesus made a huge impact when he was preaching and teaching. The lessons he taught and the vision he cast was different than what the religious establishment had been teaching for years. The religious leaders saw Jesus as a threat and wanted to get rid of him. One way they tried to get him was with religious questions. If they could catch him saying something against the truth, then they could discredit him and push him aside.

In today’s lesson, we explore one of the questions and Jesus’ wise response.

Opening

After everyone arrives, have your large group break into smaller groups of 3-4. Once everyone is settled, share with the group the introduction our Lesson Writer wrote for today’s lesson:

“Has anyone ever asked you a trick question? Some trick questions either don’t have an answer, or the way they are asked does not allow for a correct answer.

Sometimes questions are designed for no other purpose than to get someone into trouble. You’ve heard the old standard: “Answer yes or no: Have you stopped cheating on your wife? Within the framework of the question, there’s no way to answer without self-incrimination.”

Give each group a piece of paper and a pen. Then, ask each group to list as many trick questions as they can—the kind of question our Lesson Writer shared where there is no good, easy answer.

After an appropriate amount of time, ask each group to share one of their questions. Go around the room and have each group continue to share one question off their list at a time until all the questions are been asked.

Then, for discussion before moving to the Bible, ask these questions:

Which question did you think was the best trick question?

How do you feel when you are asked a question for which there is no good answer?

Opening *continued*

Have you ever asked someone a trick question? What was the question? What happened?
Is there ever a time when a trick question is the most appropriate kind of question? Why do you say that?

Reading the Bible

Who gathered together to ask Jesus a question? (the Pharisees)

Which one of the Pharisees asked the question? Why did he ask it? (a lawyer, to test Jesus)

What question did he ask Jesus? (Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?)

What was Jesus' response? ('You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.')

What did Jesus call that commandment? (the greatest and the first)

What is the second commandment? ('You shall love your neighbor as yourself.')

What question did Jesus ask the Pharisees? ("What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?")

What was their response? ("The son of David.")

What did Jesus say to the Pharisees then? ("How is it then that David by the Spirit[b] calls him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"'? If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?")

How did the Pharisees respond to that? (No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.)

Making Connections

Who were the Sadducees?

Who were the Pharisees?

When have you been the target of religious questions and inquiry by someone wanting to discredit you? What was the situation? How did you respond? What ultimately happened?

When have you been the inquisitor trying to push your own agenda on to someone else? What was the situation? What did you ask? What was the response? What ultimately happened?

When have you asked a question, knowing your question was rhetorical and only for effect, when someone actually answered it? What was the question? What was the answer?

Making Connections *continued*

In answering the Sadducees, our Lesson Writer says about Jesus, “Jesus’ response was more semantic than logical, but it was enough to silence the Sadducees, who went away remembering Jesus’ last words to them: “He is God not of the dead, but of the living.” Following God is all about living – now, as well as later.” What does that mean to you, that God is the God of the living and following God is all about living—now, as well as later?

Why do you think we like to rank things in a list of importance? What does the ranking say about us? What does the ranking say about our focus and energies?

Why did the Pharisees place so much emphasis on asking Jesus about the most important commandment? What were they hoping to accomplish with their question?

What does it mean to you to, “love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” What does that look like? How does that work?

What does it mean to you to, “love your neighbor as yourself.” What does that look like? How does that work?

Jesus flipped the questioning and asked his own, “What you think about the Messiah?” If you were asked that question, how would you answer? What do you tell others about the Messiah?

What does “lord” mean to you?

So What?

Ask your groups of 3-4 from the beginning of the lesson to gather back together. Give each group a piece of paper and a pen, or they can use the back of the sheet from the earlier session.

Ask each group to write down as much as they can to answer this question:

What can you tell me about the Messiah?

Let the groups go in any direction they want, knowing there is not a wrong direction to go with their answers. After a few minutes, ask each group to report back to the larger group what they say about the Messiah.

After every group has shared, work as a large group to come up with a combined explanation/answer to that question. Record the thoughts on the board for everyone to see.

The Challenge

This week, take time each day to answer the question, “What do you think about the Messiah?” Make that question a part of your devotional time.

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for the wisdom of Jesus as he faced accusers and challenges. Give us the wisdom to know what to say when we are challenged. Give us the courage to stand up to those that oppose us. Open our minds and hearts to more fully understand what it means that Jesus is the Messiah. Help us to share that good news with others. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Levirate marriage—When the custom of levirate marriage began, and to what extent it was actually practiced, is unknown. It’s rarely mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, but does feature prominently in the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38.

The rules for levirate marriage are found in Deut. 25:5-10, as if they were first introduced by Moses, even though it was probably written in the late seventh century. Even so, the author of the story apparently assumed the practice had been in place long before. In that story, Jacob’s son Judah had moved away from the clan to live on his own. He married an unnamed Canaanite woman who gave birth to three sons. As they came of marriageable age, Judah arranged a marriage between his oldest son, Er, and a local woman named Tamar.

Er died before siring any children, according to the text, because he “was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD put him to death” (Gen. 38: 7). It was not unusual for the ancients to attribute untimely deaths to divine action, but the narrator’s judgment is unusually blunt.

Judah then told his second son, Onan, to marry the widow “and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her” by siring a son to carry on his brother’s name and inherit his portion of the estate. Onan saw no advantage for himself in this, so he obligingly had intercourse with Tamar, but practiced the “withdrawal method” so she would not become pregnant. The narrator considered this to be sinful, and when Onan died soon after, his death was also attributed to God’s displeasure (Gen. 38:8-10).

Judah, however, believed his sons had died because Tamar was bad luck. He refused to allow his youngest son, Shelah, to marry her, “for he feared that he too would die, like his brothers.” Instead, he sent Tamar back to live with her father, thus violating the expected practice (Gen. 38:11).

For the rest of the story and an intriguing twist, read the rest of the chapter!

This life first—I once read a story that said many years ago, the noted Baptist pastor and author Carlyle Marney was speaking to a group of students in a dormitory at Duke University. One of the students asked “Dr. Marney, would you say a word or two about the resurrection? How can I believe that it is really true?”

Marney reportedly shot back: “I’m not about to discuss that with someone of your age! How could we discuss such a thing? You haven’t even known heartburn, but less had any intimation of mortality! Come back when you’re forty-five and we’ll talk about it!”

Marney’s implication was that the young student didn’t know enough about his present life to be concerned with the next life.

Digging Deeper *continued*

Heart and mind—Ancient Hebrews considered the heart to be the center of decision-making as well as emotion. In Greek thought, decisions were a matter of the mind, while emotions were felt in the heart and the bowels. Thus, for the sake of completeness, later Jews began to add “and with all your mind” when quoting the Shema’s original call to love God with all one’s heart, soul, and might.

The Son of David—The belief that a Messiah would be born as a descendant of David goes back to 2 Samuel 7 (paralleled by 1 Chronicles 17), where David wanted to build a house (temple) for Yahweh, but God promised instead to build a house (dynasty) for David, an everlasting dynasty in which his descendants would sit on the throne. After the kingdom of Judah was defeated by the Babylonians and the Israelites no longer had a king, the prophets taught that God’s promise was still true, and that a son of David would one day arise to deliver and rule the people.

For example, Isaiah spoke of a shoot coming forth from the stump of Jesse (David’s father, Isa. 11:1), and Jeremiah declared “The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land” (Jer. 23:5).

The belief became a common assumption of the messianic hope, and is echoed in New Testament texts such as Matt. 1:1, Luke 1:32-33, Acts 15:15-16, and Hebrews 1:5.

LORD and lord—Psalm 110:1, cited by Jesus in today’s passage, is puzzling to read. The NRSV renders it “The LORD says to my lord . . .” Substituting the Hebrew terms, it would be “Yahweh says to my *’adonai* . . .” The word *’adonai* was sometimes used in reference to God, but could also be used of one human who had power over another. A servant might speak of the master as “my lord,” or anyone could speak of the king as “my lord/*’adonai*.”

In the context of this psalm, originally designed to celebrate the coronation of a new king and later interpreted prophetically, the speaker is the psalmist. Thus, “The LORD” refers to God, “my” is from the perspective of the psalmist, and “lord” is a reference to the king. In its initial context, the poet/prophet declared that Yahweh had addressed his lord, the king, promising to place him at God’s right hand and put all enemies under his feet.

New Testament writers understood the psalm as a prophecy of the messiah’s coming, so that “my lord” was understood as a reference to Jesus, who would sit at God the Father’s right hand and gain victory over evil.

The psalm was traditionally thought of as a “Psalm of David” and written by him. For the sake of the argument, Jesus spoke as if this was the case, using the Pharisee’s assumption against them. This doesn’t necessarily mean that Jesus confirmed that David was the author.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

How is the Great Commandment portrayed elsewhere in the New Testament?

The question asked of Jesus in Matthew 22:34-46 also appears in Mark 12:28-34 and Luke 10:25-28, though it is presented in different ways in keeping with the gospel writers' interests. All three synoptics locate the story in the context of Jesus' temple teachings, but they don't present it in the same way.

Matthew tended to see the Jewish authorities through a harsh lens, and routinely presented the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees in a negative light. That is the case in Matt. 22:34-46, where the question is portrayed as coming from a group of Pharisees who are trying to entrap Jesus, and they receive a due comeuppance from Jesus' sharp response.

In Mark 12:28-34, the question comes from a single cordial scribe who seems impressed by Jesus' teachings and agrees with him. In return, Jesus responded in a friendly way: "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

In Luke 10:25-28, the story serves as the prelude for the parable of the good Samaritan. The question is posed by a lawyer/scribe reportedly seeking to test Jesus. In this case, Jesus asked the questioner to repeat the answer he was most familiar with, then agreed with him. Luke goes on to say, however, that the man, "wanting to justify himself," asked "And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). Some rabbis believed that the "neighbor" of Lev. 19:18 applied only to other Jews, or even to other observant Jews, because the first half of the first said "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people." They argued that "neighbor" in the second half implied a fellow Jew, parallel to "your people."

Jesus turned the question on its head and told a story that focused on what it means to be a neighbor to someone else: it is seen in an attitude of generosity and care.

Jesus' inquisitors sincerely sought to please God, but by means of keeping a long list of rules. Jesus' teaching undercut the arguments of legalism, calling for one to be motivated by love rather than by checking all the required boxes. Love is an internally motivated and perpetually unfinished task, not an external requirement that can be completed.

In essence, the call to love God and neighbor subsumes every other commandment. Paul put it this way: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet'; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:8-10).

The Hardest Question *continued*

Paul stated it even more succinctly in Gal. 5:14: “For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” James 2:8 describes the command to love others as “the royal law.”

John’s gospel emphasizes Jesus’ insistence that the disciples should be motivated and known by their love: “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

Eduard Schweizer once pointed out that the open-ended nature of the love command means that it can never be completely fulfilled: “if anyone were to achieve his goal in loving, he would cease loving.” Yet, a believer need not despair at failing to achieve his objective: “He has the confidence of one who knows that God loves him, and he so lives in this confidence that love flows on and on” (*The Good News According to Mark* [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1970], 252).