

## WITHSTANDING INTERROGATION

*“And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him”.*

*Matthew 22:*

It sounds so banal when we hear of “the questioning” first from the Sadducees and then the Pharisees and then their appointed lawyer. It sounds so harmless “to question”. I think of green courtyards, with young people in a circle on the grass, at a university in the spring, feeling wind and hearing it blow through the ivy on the side of ancient brick buildings. It sounds so harmless until you read of the motives. In our text, the lawyer’s motive was “to test him”. Early on in the chapter, Jesus told the parable of the wedding feast comparing his adversaries with ungrateful and unresponsive invitees caused them to take counsel in how “they might entangle him with his own words”.

Therefore there were questions concerning giving to Caesar; who would be the husband of the woman in the resurrected life who was widowed and remarried 7 times in earthly life; and now final questions as to which commandment would be the greatest. They were not mere questions with the harmless question mark. In the case of our Lord, the question mark assumes its other name “The interrogation mark”. They had their mark on Christ and were set to capture him.

I have disturbing news. The heirs of the Sadducees and Pharisees and the lawyer in our text still dwell among us, to set their mark upon us, entangle us and capture us in eternal chains by denying the faith. For we who bear His name calling ourselves “Christians” do we not have that same mark set upon us also? Our Lord Jesus tells us that a student is not above his master. If they persecuted me, Jesus said, “they will persecute you also (John 15:20)”. Be prepared for the relentless questioners who aren’t seeking information but rather to make their mark. The tongue is “just a small organ” noted James in his epistle, but

with such a small thing “the world is set on fire”. We live in a land where our moral and Christian moorings have all but burned to the ground.

For the questions surely come. Just this morning in Bible Class we dealt with some of the hard ones and there are more. How can you believe that God created the world in 7 days when science says it was billions of years? How can you say homosexuality is wrong when biological science says it’s “in the genes”. How can you say that God is three persons when mathematically 3 does not equal one. How can you say you believe in hell if you say you believe in a loving God? How can you speak of the Way, the Truth and the Life. Opportunities for accusations of intolerance and even un-Canadian activity abound.

Can we ever hope to respond and stand? Jesus’ response to the second wave of attack is borne out again in his response to the third. “You neither know the Scriptures nor the power of God”. How deft is our Lord in responding with the Scriptures. For him and his adversaries the Scriptures were our Old Testament so never place them on some second tier in importance in your Christian studies. How much more bold is he in showing forth the power of God. How desirous is He for us to possess both.

He summarizes the first and second tables of the law. By citing the summary of the commandments from Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19 Jesus shows his wit with the Scriptures. You can’t argue with that. Jesus does not hide his Word, locked in some mysterious code for only a few. His will is that all may read and understand. By the power of the Holy Spirit all may stop the mouths of His enemies. Such became the case with the apostles. Who were they? For the most part they were unlearned fishermen. But in the hands of God, they were the servants of God. Everyone saw it, (Acts 4: 13) “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned

and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.”

Knowledge of Scripture is knowledge of the Christ. Scripture is not mere letters written by men but the very Word of God. “It is powerful and active sharper than any two edged sword”. And it is a Word that is ours. It is a Word that has as its centre, Jesus Christ.

Jesus then shows forth the power of God with a question concerning the Christ. “If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?” The answer rests in the two natures of Christ. He is the Son of David according to his Humanity. He is the Lord of David according to his whole person fully God and fully human.

The power of God is not just in calming the waves, casting out demons and healing the sick. It’s in assuming human flesh and dwelling among us. It’s holding a paradox of assuming the weakness of this flesh that he is strong. It’s wearing the crown yet also the towel around his waist. It’s in assuming human flesh that the very blood of God may be shed. It’s in assuming human flesh which is exactly as our own that he can relate to our struggles in the flesh. It’s in giving us that flesh to eat and blood to drink in the Sacrament which is our medicine of immortality whereby we live forever.

It’s all in the Old Testament concerning how the Christ would come, born of the Virgin, truly God and truly man. Jesus quoted from the Psalm 110 in this Gospel passage.

The Lord says to my Lord,  
    Sit at my right hand,  
Until I make your enemies your footstool.

And also in many Old Testament passages the Messiah is to be “the Son of David”. See 2 Samuel 7:11 ff, where God promises David that his Offspring will found the “kingdom that extends forever”. God promises that “Your throne shall be established forever”. No earthly king could ever make such a claim. Royal Houses rise and fall with great regularity even among those nations retaining monarchy.

He is most certainly David’s Son. In the fullness of time, he assumed human flesh exactly like our own yet without sin. Yet, Jesus Christ is fully God. Jesus tells us as much when he says things like “Before Abraham was I Am”. Coming from eternity, he is fully God.

When you behold the two natures of Christ, you see something truly unique. You see something truly mysterious and truly powerful.

And yet it is undeniably true. The apostles bear witness to our Lord’s two natures. They beheld His Glory through his miracles and on the Mount of Transfiguration and through his Word. And at the same time they literally “handled the Word of Life” as 1 John 1:1 reads. They saw the man as a man: tired at times, weeping at others, exasperated as any other. They held the hand of the man from Galilee and in so doing also held the very hand of God. “He who has seen me has seen the Father (John 14:9)” claims our Lord.

Wow! Every day we ought to marvel with the Christ who comes into our midst. Behold “the power of God”. Behold the Word of God. And stand fast.

The questioners shall surely come. They are at the door. They are not after information. They seek to tempt us as they sought to tempt the Christ and trip up our souls to lose salvation.

The questioners may be the young person at university; the middle aged person watching Opra; the elderly confronted with their own suffering; even the theologian at his books. The serpent slithers and questions. He still says “Did God really say?” He seeks us to question God’s Word. He seeks for us to question the nature of Christ. He would have us believe that we are on the precipice of finding some hitherto, never-found-before truth and unique insights. But such folly leads only to death. But there is a sure defense.

Know the Scriptures. Know of the power of God. He is faithful and just and will not let you be tempted beyond what you can stand. He is as close to you as His Word. He can sustain you as surely as he sustained the prophets and apostles before you. He can sustain you as surely as he sustained the Holy Martyrs literally through fires before you. They did not recant. They would not recant. Rather they repeated the words of St. Peter when he was challenged concerning the power of Jesus’ body and blood.

“Lord, to whom shall we go, you have the Words of Eternal Life”.  
Alleluia.

May we rejoice this day in the gifts He has given. May we stand fast as surely as the Lord stood fast in the midst of his interrogators.

Amen.