

the scriptures, there would come a time when one would grow weary of them. Oh, no! They are so fresh and so wonderful and so powerful. What a privilege it is to go back to them when challenges arise. Challenges will come to all of us, because that is what life is about” (*Mine Errand from the Lord*, 152).

Then, just recently, he added this powerful confirmation of his love for the Book of Mormon: “I love the Book of Mormon. It is a part of my being. Over the years, as I have grown from a young man to what I call ‘upper middle age,’ I find in the Book of Mormon an ever new and refreshing fountain of information and blessings. If you were to ask me what parts of the Book of Mormon were my favorite or what parts impressed me most, I can answer that very quickly: All of it” (*Mine Errand from the Lord*, 157).

As one who has had his entire professional career in Church education, I can add my own witness to what President Packer has said about the scriptures. I have come to love them and find the answers to life’s questions in them. They have become such an integral part of my life.

**RE:** *If you were to summarize President Packer’s desire concerning his teachings, what would you say?*

**Williams:** Of course, I would never presume to speak for President Packer, but after reading and studying in depth so much of what he has taught, perhaps this statement is a good summary: “In the course of my efforts to teach His gospel, I have come to know Him, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Only Begotten of the Father. I stand in reverence before Him with deep regard for what He taught, and with deep regard for how He taught. It is not untoward for any of us to aspire to teach as He taught. It is not untoward for any of us to aspire to be like Him. He was not just a teacher, He was the master teacher” (*Mine Errand from the Lord*, 337).

From my personal experience, President Packer’s teachings have increased my capacity to discern pure doctrine and my ability to teach and influence others has been enhanced. I would personally affirm that from my witness of the Spirit on so many occasions, I know he has obtained his “errand from the Lord.” **RE**

# The Savior’s Questions: Teachings from the Last Week of His Life

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As the Master Teacher, Christ set the example for those aspiring to teach his gospel. His gift to educate and uplift is evident in the recorded testimonies of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. During the last week of the Savior’s mortal ministry, he was frequently questioned by those who came to him. His responses to those questions are timeless teachings. Christ also taught powerfully by asking poignant questions.<sup>1</sup> An analysis of Christ’s use of questions during the last week of his mortal ministry provides a teaching model for those endeavoring to teach more like the Master.

Years ago I read the Gospels with a focus on how Christ used questions in his teachings and how he responded to questions asked of him.<sup>2</sup> It was an excellent study experience that changed the way I taught, especially in relationship to asking better questions and listening to and answering questions asked of me. I recognized that asking and answering questions is really an art and a skill that can be strengthened and developed. After analyzing the questions used in the Gospels, I was more able to recognize my own weakness in this area, which enabled me to improve.

Although asking and answering questions in an appropriate and Christlike manner can be a difficult skill to master, it is possible to make a marked improvement. If this skill is developed, it can dramatically improve teaching. President Boyd K. Packer taught the value of questions in teaching: “The simplest way to learn something is to ask a

question about it. Questions and answers are essential to any teaching method.”<sup>3</sup>

The last week of Christ’s mortal life truly was a hostile teaching environment. Most gospel teachers do not experience such fierce opposition while teaching, although some called to teach may have felt as if all were against them. Perhaps the most valuable finding from this analysis is Christ’s ability to use questions to his advantage while teaching. Good questions can diffuse arguments, placate a dissident student, and even capture the interest of the otherwise uninvolved. Christ was the Master Teacher, and his teaching examples are impressive for those who choose to follow him in that regard.

### To Jerusalem for the Passover

Many may have wondered if Jesus would come to Jerusalem for his final Passover since the Jewish leaders were seeking his death. The Gospel of John contains a question asked of Jesus just before his going to Jerusalem. The question comes from his disciple, Judas Iscariot, after he judges Mary Magdalene’s adoration of Christ as unbridled and unnecessary devotion. “Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spike-nard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?” (John 12:3–5). Jesus chooses to respond to Judas’s question by teaching his disciples and preparing them for the significant events to come, saying, “Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always” (John 12:7–8).

Mary Magdalene’s act of worship and reverence for the Savior by anointing him with such an abundance of costly spikenard gave Jesus the opportunity to respond to a question which proved to be hypocritical by the week’s end. Answers to common Christian questions of what to do with abundant monetary means, appropriate allocation of financial support for the poor, and the recognition of special opportunities or events all may be interpreted from this interaction. Jesus had clearly established during his ministry the need to care for the poor, and this teaching moment was not a contradiction but a clarification for those who had assumed that the priority was always to care for the poor. Christ’s brief yet powerful response released Mary Magdalene from the judgments of Judas and the others—but, more importantly, reminded them of his pending death. Judas’s lack of recognition of the impor-

tant events to come was manifest in his zeal to correct the behavior of another while conspiring in his heart to betray the Lord.

Teachers and students would do well to learn from this teaching moment of Christ’s. Knowing what he knew, Christ could have chosen this opportunity to condemn Judas for what he was preparing to do. Instead, Christ chose to teach those who had ears to hear. This must have been a significant teaching moment for the rest of his disciples, who carried the responsibility of bearing the burden of the kingdom following Jesus’s death. Christ’s informative response also protected Mary Magdalene. Christlike teachers instruct those who will hear and protect those like Mary Magdalene who are under their charge. It is important for a teacher to provide a safe environment for those who choose to respond to questions as well as those asking the questions. It is the responsibility of gospel teachers to honor the agency of others and teach truth, thereby enabling them to choose right without compulsion.<sup>4</sup>

### Triumphal Entry

The last week of Christ’s mortal ministry began with his triumphal entry into the Holy City of Jerusalem during Passover. After a brief three-year ministry, opposition toward Christ culminated during the last week of the Savior’s mortal life, intensifying his teaching opportunities. From the Gospel of John we read, “On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord” (John 12:12–13). Matthew’s record contains a question about the significance of this prophesied event: “And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee” (Matthew 21:10–11).

The Pharisees, who had already counseled together on how to destroy Christ (see Matthew 12:14), perceived their lack of power against the excitement of the people as he entered the city. The Gospel of John contains their questioning concern marked by their realization of his popularity with the common people. “The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him” (John 12:19). Although this question is not answered by Christ, it helps to explain the controversy which surrounded his Triumphal Entry, which inspired so many questions and

provided the unprecedented public forum for his teachings amid such intense opposition.

### Money Changers

The polarizing effect of Christ's miracles and seemingly radical ideas set the stage for a spiritual standoff at the sacred temple in Jerusalem. The Gospel of Matthew describes the questions posed to Christ and his responses during the heated exchange between the Lord of the temple and those who had made it their place of business:

And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves,

And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.

And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them.

And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; they were sore displeased,

And said unto him, Hearest thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise? (Matthew 21:12–16)

In their zeal to find fault with Christ, the chief priests and scribes cried foul at the people's praise of Jesus. Those unrighteous rulers wanted Christ to acknowledge the people's foolish blasphemy, yet instead, Christ quoted scripture regarding the prophetic potential of children. In this instance we see a common response of Christ to an unrighteous question. Christ chooses to respond to their prideful question with a question of his own. His question addressed the scribes' supposed knowledge of the scriptures. Christ again protects the innocent who openly acknowledged him and uses the scriptures to counter the false accusations of the scribes against those who had cried hosanna to his name.

Mark's account of the cleansing of the temple is slightly different in that it contains a question proposed by Jesus. It is a rhetorical question directed toward those that were buying and selling in the temple: "Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves. And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine" (Mark 11:17–18). Christ's direct manner of focusing on the spiritual instead of the

temporal had an astonishing effect on the people and acted as a fan on the flame of opposition that burned against him. While Luke 19 adds a third witness to the cleansing of the temple, it does not contain a question. The Gospel of John is silent on this event.

The famous cleansing of the temple is occasionally portrayed by teachers and speakers to show the human side of Christ and that he too may have been angry sometimes, in an attempt to justify a mortal in righteous indignation. However, focusing on the question that Christ asked draws attention to another possibility for his intent. It is highly probable that the cleansing of the temple was a premeditated act and not an angry outburst by Jesus. He clearly uses the event to teach those present of the sacred nature of the temple and the impropriety of allowing the things of the world to take center stage there. His teachings astonish the people and anger the leaders who feel the laity is being drawn to these new doctrines.

As an exemplary teacher, Christ here demonstrates the powerful impact of using an appropriate object lesson. His object not only temporarily distracted or entertained those he was attempting to teach but also prepared them to be taught. The setting, coupled with the right question, provided the teaching moment that had such a tremendous effect on those present at the temple. Gospel teachers aspiring to impact the hearts and minds of their students would do well to follow Christ's example of how to use available objects and situations when teaching.

### Priests Challenge Christ's Authority

After cleansing the temple of money changers, Christ taught daily therein. In his Father's house, Christ was approached by those with supposed authority, who questioned by what authority he taught and performed miracles. The synoptic Gospels are nearly identical in their accounts of these events. Christ again chooses to answer accusations posed as questions with questions of his own. From the Gospels we read:

It came to pass, that on one of those days, as he taught the people in the temple, and preached the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes came upon him with the elders,

And spake unto him, saying, Tell us, by what authority doest thou these things? or who is he that gave thee this authority?

And he answered and said unto them, I will also ask you one thing; and answer me:

The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?

And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say, Why then believed ye him not?

But and if we say, Of men; all the people will stone us: for they be persuaded that John was a prophet.

And they answered, that they could not tell whence it was.

And Jesus said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things. (Luke 20:1–8; see also Matthew 21:23–27; Mark 11:27–33)

Christ exemplified responding to insincere questioning with disarming questions of his own. This design gives insight to teachers on how to deal with problematic questions in public settings. The inability of the frustrated religious leaders to counter the questions and responses of the relatively youthful Jesus was evidence of their focus on the things of this world and their unwillingness to be taught by the Son of God. At some point most teachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ will have students who publicly ask leading or inappropriate questions. Following Christ's example of asking good questions can diffuse the potentially volatile situation, while teaching volumes to those present with listening ears.

Christ's public countering of the religious authorities fueled their animosity toward him. In spite of their growing hatred, he continued to teach, offering salvation for all who would heed his words. Christ's peaceful means of disarming his enemies through his powerful questions and masterful responses teach us today on how to deal with opposition to our teaching the gospel of salvation. Certain people wanted to hear but not hearken to Christ's teachings in the temple during the last week of his life. It is not entirely different than today when we celebrate the Easter season without acknowledging the sacred import of that holiday nor the events and teachings it is built upon.<sup>5</sup>

Christ taught as one who not only seemed to have authority but truly did. Yet he did not waste effort trying to convince those that were decidedly against him and his Father. Christ's refusal to cast pearls towards those that would not believe followed the pattern of his own teachings from the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 7:6). He turned his attention and his teachings to those who hungered and thirsted after righteousness. Christ focused on his responsibilities and the tasks ahead and allowed those that sought to destroy him to be about their business of evil. There is a time to reason with, and even resist, those with evil designs and intentions. But teaching by the Spirit also permits turning the other cheek and not reviling against those with the intent to harm. Some are not ready to hear or embrace truth, and it

has a stumbling effect rather than converting power. This may be one reason Jesus taught in parables. With parables Christ was able to both reveal and conceal truths depending on the listener. Christ often used questions to set the stage for these parables.

### Questions and Parables

After refuting those questioning his authority, Jesus poses a question in preparation to teach a parable: "A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to day in my vineyard. He answered and said, I will not: but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, I go, sir: and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father?" (Matthew 21:28–31). Jesus implies in the first question that another question is coming, which it indeed does, with a condemning connotation.

On this occasion those questioned by Jesus were not left speechless. Instead, they chose to boldly give the correct answer, selecting the repentant son who ultimately complied—though he was unwilling at first. Their correct response proved self-condemning, and so Jesus compared them to the second son who said he would, but did not. "They [chief priests and those with them] say unto him [Jesus], The first. Jesus saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him" (Matthew 21:31–32).

Christ's direct comparison of the first son to the publicans and the harlots—who were despised and considered unclean by the chief priests—made these accusations especially poignant, thus further igniting their hatred for Jesus and the truths he taught. Christ's open declaration that known sinners would go to heaven before the leaders of the Jews challenged their abuse of authority. This teaching corresponds well with what we learn in the Doctrine and Covenants: "For of him unto whom much is given much is required; and he who sins against the greater light shall receive the greater condemnation" (D&C 82:3). Although many that questioned Jesus truly had been given much, they seemed more concerned with rights and positions than with their responsibility to act. The British political philosopher Edmund Burke commented, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."<sup>6</sup>

In the parable of two sons, Christ taught that sins of omission can also be condemning. President Spencer W. Kimball said, “Declining to serve when called may constitute a sin of omission as well as one of commission. Certainly it is a sin of omission to accept responsibility, to covenant with the Lord, and then fail to do the work as well as possible. . . . One breaks the priesthood covenant by transgressing commandments—but also by leaving undone his duties. Accordingly, to break this covenant one needs only to do nothing.”<sup>7</sup> The accusations that Christ leveled at those in authority have special significance for any who have duties or responsibilities in the kingdom of God. Leaders and gospel teachers are entrusted to tread carefully on the sacred minds of those they teach. They should not take lightly their responsibility to strengthen faith, and they should not sow seeds of doubt. President Gordon B. Hinckley taught, “Effective teaching is the very essence of leadership in the Church. Eternal life . . . will come only as men and women are *taught with such effectiveness* that they change and discipline their lives.”<sup>8</sup>

In the parable of the wicked husbandmen, Christ continued his condemnation of those who had questioned his authority while abusing their own authority. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all address the parable of the wicked husbandmen with some variation. In Matthew this parable immediately follows the parable of the two sons.<sup>9</sup> The parable of the wicked husbandmen does not begin with a question but ends with one. Christ again uses his question to point out the neglect of those who had been entrusted with the care of God’s vineyard:

Hear another parable: There was a certain householder, which planted a vineyard, and hedged it round about, and digged a winepress in it, and built a tower, and let it out to husbandmen, and went into a far country:

And when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it.

And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another.

Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise.

But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son.

But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance.

And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him.

When the lord therefore of the vineyard cometh, what will he do unto those husbandmen? (Matthew 21:33–40; see also Mark 12:1–9)

Again those which answer the question of the parable correctly do so to their own condemnation: “He will miserably destroy those wicked men, and will let out his vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons” (Matthew 21:41). President John Taylor wrote, “If you do not magnify your callings, God will hold you responsible for those whom you might have saved had you done your duty.”<sup>10</sup>

The Savior again answers his own question with another piercing question of personal accountability, “Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?” (Matthew 21:42). Christ’s declaration in this parable is a warning to nations who have the truth and squander it: “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder” (Matthew 21:43–44). This time the accusations were apparent, and the chief priests recognized that the parable condemned them: “And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude, because they took him for a prophet” (Matthew 21:45–46; see also Mark 12:10–12).

The insights gained from the Gospel of Luke help us understand why the chief priests took Christ’s accusations so seriously. Luke’s account portrays a slightly different element, with the lord of the vineyard saying that he would send his beloved son. “Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him” (Luke 20:13). The chief priests had acknowledged the grievous nature of the behavior of the wicked husbandmen; thus for Christ to indicate that they were guilty of this behavior was inexcusable by the interpretation of their laws. They also recognized that Christ was telling them that he was the son in the parable and that their secret desire was to destroy the Son of God (see Luke 20:14–20).

While studying the Savior’s use of questions in parables, the reader may be wondering if Jesus purposefully provoked the Jewish leaders to bring about his own death. Robert J. Matthews wrote, “The

withholding of information [in parables] may also have been done for the protection of the disciples, so as to shield them from the envy of the Jewish leaders and from the consequent persecution that plainer speech might have provoked at that stage of the ministry. Had Jesus spoken plainer the wicked might have figured out what strong doctrine he was teaching and sought to kill him earlier than they did.”<sup>11</sup> It is entirely possible that Christ, knowing the end result of this tumultuous week, set about to teach the truth with brazenness, inviting all who would listen to come and knowing full well what would happen.

Christ’s aggressive use of condemning questions elicited additional concentrated attacks and efforts to turn the hearts of the masses against him. Those with religious position were wise enough to recognize that they needed to turn the voice of the people against this Jesus of Nazareth, who was rising daily in popularity. Thus, they attempted to trap Christ with the law. Christ knew the thoughts and intents of their hearts, yet he consented to their invitation to eat bread with the Pharisees that he might teach them, even if it was against their will.<sup>12</sup>

Christ shows how to maintain control of a teaching situation through the use of good questions. The Gospel of Luke describes the setting for two of these powerful questions: “it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched him. And, behold, there was a certain man before him which had the dropsy. And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? And they held their peace. And he took him, and healed him, and let him go; and answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day?” (Luke 14:1–5).

The combination of this miraculous healing on the Sabbath and Christ’s subsequent questions attracts the Jewish leaders’ angered attention. Elder Bruce R. McConkie said this was apparently a deliberate attempt to keep Christ’s name in the headlines.<sup>13</sup> This was clearly not an occasion of self-aggrandizement but an attempt to increase opportunities to teach the truths of salvation and invite all to come unto his Father by believing that he was indeed the Son of God. In Luke’s record, the Sabbath healing and the questions Christ posed set the stage for his masterful teaching in the parable of the wedding guests (see Luke 14:7–14). In this parable, Christ combines familiar customs of his day with esteemed wisdom from the past to teach a moral principle so powerfully that it has since become a Christian proverb.<sup>14</sup>

While Elder McConkie does not specifically connect the parable of the wedding guests to the parable of the wedding of a king’s son (Matthew 22:1–14), others do.<sup>15</sup> In Matthew’s account there is a thought-provoking question embedded in the parable of the wedding of a king’s son, “And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment?” (Matthew 22:12). This may appear as a contradictory question to some, or overtly harsh to others, for the king throws the man out saying, “Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen” (vv. 13–14). In the parable the angry king turns his back on those invited guests that spurned his son’s wedding, and he has his servants fill the wedding with guests gathered from all places. This they do, only to turn and cast one man out from among them because he is not wearing an appropriate wedding garment. This is an effective question and teaching moment for those present with Jesus, for they understood the wedding imagery and were also familiar with Christ’s reference to Zephaniah’s Old Testament prophecies of the Second Coming.<sup>16</sup> Not all invited to come unto Christ will choose to do so, and those that come unprepared will be turned away. Jesus teaches difficult doctrine in this parable that those with the “all accepting” or “saved by claiming only” belief may struggle to accept.

For the honestly seeking teacher or student, Christ used parables to teach what kind of questions the humbly righteous might ask. In the parable of the sheep and goats, Jesus taught that at his Second Coming he will separate out the righteous and the wicked from all nations (see Matthew 25:31–46). In the midst of the parable, Christ teaches that the righteous will respond to their being chosen with a series of sincere questions: “Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?” (Matthew 25:37–39). Having had their faith strengthened by being gathered with the righteous, they ask how they earned such a reward.<sup>17</sup> In answer to the honest of heart, Christ teaches in the parable a now famous Christian verse, “And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:40). This parable and the embedded questions have taught millions of Christians that the way of salvation is treating the needy the way we would treat Christ.

## Response to Entrapment

Three of the Gospels similarly address the controversial question posed to Christ by the Pharisees and the Herodians. The politically oppressed Jews anguished over their lack of freedom and occupation by the Romans. Seeking to destroy Christ, the Pharisees attempted to trap Christ on the issue of Roman taxation (see Matthew 22:15–22; Mark 12:13–17; Luke 20:20–26). Those with ill intent questioned, “Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?” (Matthew 22:17). Christ questioned their intent with the skillful use of an object lesson. His refute of their dichotomous question was so masterful that it disarmed his would-be assailants, and they left him, marveling at his wisdom and their inability to trap him. Their use of flattery followed by a trick question was no match for the honesty and truth of the Master Teacher.<sup>18</sup> It is a comforting thought to those seeking righteousness and a frightful thought for those who do harm that Christ knows the thoughts and intents of all hearts. For one teaching by the Spirit, it is possible to receive inspiration and greater understanding of the questions and intentions of those being taught.

The Sadducees sought to condemn Christ with the law of Moses by posing a question concerning marriage that they believed would reveal that his teachings were contradictory to their laws. The Gospels read:

Then come unto him the Sadducees, which say there is no resurrection; and they asked him, saying,

Master, Moses wrote unto us, If a man’s brother die, and leave his wife behind him, and leave no children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother.

Now there were seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and dying left no seed.

And the second took her, and died, neither left he any seed: and the third likewise.

And the seven had her, and left no seed: last of all the woman died also.

In the resurrection therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be of them? for the seven had her to wife.

And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?

For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven.

And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying,

I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?

He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err. (Mark 12:18–27; see also Luke 20:27–36; Matthew 22:23–33)

Christ’s response to the Sadducees’ question does not contain a question, but an in-depth doctrinal look at the Resurrection, which the Sadducees did not believe in. Their trap was foiled, and their exposure put them at odds with those who did believe in the Resurrection. They too left Jesus, not daring to ask any more questions (see Luke 20:39–40).

The Sadducees’ attempt to deceive Jesus exposed their lack of knowledge of the scriptures and their disbelief in doctrine that was the core of their question. Elder McConkie explained, “[Jesus] is not denying but limiting the prevailing concept that there will be marrying and giving in marriage in heaven. He is saying that as far as ‘they’ (the Sadducees) are concerned, that as far as ‘they’ (‘the children of the world’) are concerned, the family unit does not and will not continue in the resurrection. . . . There is marrying and giving of marriage in heaven only for those who live the fulness of gospel law.”<sup>19</sup> If the Sadducees’ question was of sincere interest, backed by faith, Christ surely could have taught the fullness of his gospel in this situation; but their faithless ill intent left the issue unaddressed. Some doctrinal critics of the Latter-day Saints erroneously use this same passage to malign Latter-day Saint belief in eternal marriage. Like the Sadducees, they err by not understanding the scriptures and the doctrine. From a teaching perspective, Christ’s effective confounding of the leaders provided more time for those who were desirous to ask sincere questions and learn from the truths that he taught. To effectively teach or share the gospel of Jesus Christ, one must be conscious of the time one has.

Hearing of Christ silencing the Sadducees, the Pharisees again gather and enlist a confident lawyer to ask a question. “Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” (Matthew 22:35–36). Christ’s response to the question is clear and direct and establishes a bulwark of Christian practice: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (vv. 37–40; see also Mark 12:28–31). This is a telling response to this proposed expert of the law, as he was clearly attempting to entrap Christ, his present neighbor.

The Gospel of Luke records a slight difference in the exchange of questions that leads to the piercing parable of the good Samaritan: “And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He [Christ] said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live. But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:25–29). The lawyer attempts to justify mistreatment of one with whom he is not acquainted.

And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.

Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?

And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise. (Luke 10:30–37)

To patiently teach is to practice the principles taught in this story. “Good Samaritanism is contagious. Providing in the Lord’s way humbles the rich, exalts the poor, and sanctifies both. . . . Good Samaritanism starts in the home as parents teach children by example and precept. . . . May we be generous with our time and liberal in our contributions for the care of those who suffer. May we commit to the principles of Good Samaritanism and be ever mindful of the need to ‘go, and do thou likewise.’”<sup>20</sup>

For many teachers it is difficult to teach the especially needy. Students who dominate classtime or the teacher’s attention can be difficult to handle, but the good Samaritan story reminds us all of our obligation to help those in need of our assistance. President Thomas

S. Monson taught, “We have a responsibility to prove to our Heavenly Father, by the things we do, that we love him. . . . Though we may not necessarily forfeit our lives in service to our God, we can certainly demonstrate our love for him by how well we serve him. . . . Each of us has opportunities for Church assignments. This opportunity of serving in the Church enables us to demonstrate a love of God and a love of our neighbor. . . . There is no finer way to demonstrate love of God than by serving him in the positions to which we may be called.”<sup>21</sup> We must not only love our neighbor, but be willing to teach them the truths of the gospel as well.

## Conclusion

Gratefully, those in our day called to teach their neighbors the gospel of Jesus Christ have resources available to assist them in their difficult task of preparation. The Church publication *Teaching, No Greater Call* offers helpful suggestions on effectively teaching with questions: “Church-produced lesson manuals suggest many questions that you can use in lessons. Read them carefully to decide which will be most helpful for those you teach. You may also prepare your own questions. As you consider questions to use in a lesson, ask yourself, ‘Will they help those I teach understand the main ideas of the lesson? Will these questions help those I teach apply the gospel principles being taught?’”<sup>22</sup> Prayerfully preparing lessons, including the preparation of questions and preparing for potential questions from students, facilitates teaching more like Christ. As noted in the beginning of this article, although asking and answering questions in an appropriate and Christlike manner can be a difficult skill to master, it is possible to make a marked improvement no matter how skilled a teacher currently is. As President Packer taught, “The simplest way to learn something is to ask a question about it. Questions and answers are essential to any teaching method.”<sup>23</sup> Teaching like the Master must include some preparation and consideration of how to ask and answer questions in a Christlike manner. **RE**

## Notes

1. See Jeffrey R. Holland, “Teaching and Learning in the Church,” *Liabona*, June 2007, 66–67.

2. While much has been said and written pertaining to the last week of the Savior’s life, I am aware of only one paper which addressed the questions Jesus asked. See Brian L. Smith, “The Questions Jesus Asked,” in *The Eighth Annual*



*Church Educational System Religious Educators' Symposium* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1984), 150. My presentation will be a specific analysis of the Savior's use of questions during the last week of his mortal life.

3. Boyd K. Packer, *Teach Ye Diligently* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 65.

4. See Jeffrey R. Holland, "A Teacher Come from God," *Ensign*, May 1998, 26n10.

5. See Gordon B. Hinckley, in Conference Report, April 1994, 94. President Hinckley said, "Today [Easter morning] is observed as the anniversary of the greatest miracle [the Resurrection] in human history."

6. Edmund Burke, quoted in George Seldes, *The Great Thoughts* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), 67.

7. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), 95–96.

8. Gordon B. Hinckley, quoted in Jeffrey R. Holland, in Conference Report, April 1998, 31.

9. The parable of the two sons is only found in Matthew.

10. John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1880), 20:23.

11. Robert J. Matthews, *Behold the Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), 169.

12. Arthur A. Just Jr., ed., *Luke*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 3:233–36.

13. See Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), 499.

14. See McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 500.

15. See Thomas A. Wayment, quoted in D. Kelly Ogden, *Verse by Verse: The Four Gospels* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2006), 481–83.

16. See Zephaniah 1:7–8; McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 597–99.

17. See Manlio Simonetti, ed., *Matthew*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 1b:| 230–35.

18. See Ogden, *Verse by Verse*, 484–86.

19. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:606.

20. H. David Burton, in Conference Report, April 1997, 107–8.

21. Thomas S. Monson, "How Do We Show Our Love?" *Ensign*, January 1998, 2, 4–5.

22. *Teaching, No Greater Call: A Resource Guide for Gospel Teaching* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999), 68.

23. Boyd K. Packer, *Teach Ye Diligently* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 65.

# John the Baptist: The Miracle and the Mission

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Jesus testified that "among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist" (Luke 7:28; see also Matthew 11:11). In fact, the Savior called John "more than a prophet" (Matthew 11:9). What was the source of John's greatness? It was not an upbringing and education in the Jerusalem schools. It was not the number of his baptisms or disciples. It was not the performance of miracles. Yet Jesus saw greatness in ways the world could not detect. Miraculous events accompanied John's premortal, mortal, and post-mortal life, giving credence to the Savior's supreme tribute.

## Miraculous Premortality

Ancient prophets such as Isaiah, Lehi, Nephi, and Malachi foretold John's mission, revealing that he would be a messenger for the Lord who would cry from the wilderness to prepare the way before the coming of Jesus, and who would baptize Him (see Isaiah 40:3; Malachi 3:1; 1 Nephi 10:7–8; 11:27; 2 Nephi 31:4). John was not the only faithful member of the house of Israel in his day; however, he was the singular individual with the prophesied responsibility to "make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (Isaiah 40:3), a metaphor alluding to "a runner who immediately precedes the horse or chariot of high officials in order to clear the way or make a proclamation."<sup>1</sup> Although an earthly king might summon fifty men to run before his chariots and horsemen preparing the way for the royal entourage (see 1 Kings