

Great Rhetorical Questions of the Bible: Part I

Matthew 16:24-27

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** Study and contemplation of God's Word is the most important activity any person can pursue.

Jn. 6:68: *"But Simon Peter answered Him, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.'"*

Jn. 12:48: *"He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him; the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day."*

2. Furthermore, it is an understatement of major proportion to say the Bible is a unique book (comparison of Bible literary style to law library literary style; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

3. The word of God appeals to man on every level: intellectually, logically, and emotionally.

Intellect: Eph. 5:17: *"Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is."*

4. It's a book that can be understood by the humble and uneducated, yet withholds its great truths from the greatest minds the world has ever known (Lk. 8:11-15).

Matt. 11:25: *"At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes."*

5. God's word uses many literary devices (i.e., figures of speech) to appeal to our intellect, our sense of logic, our common sense, our emotions and help us understand. For example:

A. **Simile:** "...an explicitly stated comparison employing words such as "like" and "as." The understanding of the simile can usually be gained by reflection without any historical research because that which follows the "as" or "like" is a commonly known item of experience." (Mickelsen, A. B. *Interpreting the Bible: A Book of Basic Principles for Understanding the Scriptures*, p. 182)

- (1) For example, on seven occasions in Matthew 13 Jesus used similes when He says, "... the kingdom of heaven is like..."

- ✓ v. 24: "...man who sowed good seed in his field;"
- ✓ v. 31: "...mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field,"
- ✓ v. 33: "...leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal..."
- ✓ v. 44: "...treasure hidden in a field,"
- ✓ v. 45: "...merchant seeking beautiful pearls"
- ✓ v. 47: "...dragnet that was cast into the sea"
- ✓ v. 52: "...householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old."

B. **Metaphor:** "...is comparison by direct assertion, in which the speaker or writer describes one thing in terms of something else. Most metaphors are *designed*; i.e., the author intends to make a direct comparison." (Mickelsen, A. B. *Interpreting the Bible: A Book of Basic Principles for Understanding the Scriptures*, p. 183)

- (1) **Examples:**

(a) **Jesus as Shepard and His followers as a flock of sheep:**

- ✓ **Jn. 10:11:** *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep."*

(b) **Jesus as the door to salvation.**

- ✓ **Jn. 10:7-9:** “I am the door of the sheep. 8 All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. 9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.”

6. **3** We could point out many other figures of speech the Bible employs, but that alone is not the purpose of this lesson (e.g., over 30 including ellipsis, hyperbole, metonymy, synecdoche).
- A. Suffice it to say that Our Great Creator created us with intellect, He created us with a sense of logic, and He created us with emotions.
- B. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that He would communicate with us while appealing to the various aspects of our personalities through His word.
- Eph. 1:7-9:** “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself.”
- C. Notice that God made His grace (redemption through the blood of Christ) “abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence.”
- (1) How did God achieve this?
- (2) By making “...known to us the mystery of His will” (i.e., revealed His grace by communicating it to us through His word). And notice the **HOW** of that communication, He used:
- (a) **Wisdom:** understanding, insight, the ability to apply knowledge in precisely the correct manner in order to achieve the desired outcome.
- (b) **Prudence:** forethought, carefulness; the ability to chose just the right words to fully express what needs to be known in such a way that it can be fully understood.
7. I submit to you that there is good reason why God has expressed Himself in this way.
- A. There is good reason why He made the message of the cross “abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence.”
- B. Because He created us in His image; and we too have the ability to exercise wisdom and prudence in understanding and applying His grace and will to our lives...**IF** we will take the time and effort to do so (careful contemplation).
8. Today I want to focus on several passages that appeal to our intellect, our logic, our “common sense” if you will. However, as we reflect on these passages they should touch our emotion and motivate us to take action (Lk. 6:46).
9. Each of these passages employs my favorite “literary device,” the rhetorical question.
- A. A rhetorical question is a question where the questioner is not seeking a verbal answer, because the answer is so obvious that anyone with even an ounce of common sense will instantly know the answer.
- B. For example, in popular culture when asked a question with an obvious answer we often do not answer back with a simple yes, but with a somewhat sarcastic rhetorical question like:
- (1) Is the sky blue?
- (2) Is the pope Catholic?
- (3) We don’t expect an answer, because everyone knows the answer is YES! The sky is blue and the pope is Catholic.

- C. "Rhetorical questions are far more than a teaching technique." They are "...a means of focusing the [our] thought upon a central idea." (Mickelsen, A. B. *Interpreting the Bible: A Book of Basic Principles for Understanding the Scriptures*, p. 188)

10. 4 And that is exactly the purpose of our lesson today and in future weeks.

- A. I want to consider several rhetorical questions found in God's word so that we may focus our thoughts on some very critical issues.
- B. God has designed these rhetorical questions to appeal to our intellect, logic and common sense.
- C. They are meant to drive home the most profound and obvious of divine truths.
- D. And, if we will read and reflect on these rhetorical questions and apply even the slimmest measure of common sense we will know exactly what course of action we must not hesitate to take in our lives.

II. DISCUSSION:

I. 5 Matthew 16:26:

- A. The first thing any good speech or sermon writer will tell you is to build your speech or sermon to a crescendo; save your most important point for the end so that you make the maximum impression on your audience.
- B. However, as I organized this material it seemed so obvious to me that what I believe to be the most important rhetorical question in God's word must be considered first. Because if we cannot answer and take action on this question then every other question is superfluous.
- C. ** Before considering this question we need to spend a moments reviewing basic truths.

(1) We are created in God's image:

Gen. 1:26-27: "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' 27 So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

What does that mean? Let's link several important passages:

(2) Man is "dual" being; we are made up of two parts: a spiritual part and a physical part:

(a) The spiritual part of man is the part of man that is like God:

Jn. 4:24: "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Lk. 24:39: "Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have."; Gen. 1:26-27

(b) The spiritual part of man resides in, and animates, our physical body:

2 Cor. 5:1: "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

2 Pet. 1:13-14: "Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, 14 knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me."

Eccl. 12:6-7: "Remember your Creator before the silver cord is loosed, Or the golden bowl is broken, Or the pitcher shattered at the fountain, Or the wheel broken at the well. 7 Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, And the spirit will return to God who gave it."

(c) **God created man with a “dual nature,” the body of flesh which “houses” our eternal spirit or soul.**

(3) Man has always been amenable (i.e., answerable) to God’s law:

Gen. 2:16-17: “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; *17* but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

(a) We know Adam and Eve violated God’s law, but notice...

Gen. 5:5: “So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died.”

(b) So, what about **Gen. 2:17:** “...for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”?

(i) Death = separation,

(ii) Separation of soul/spirit from physical body at death of the physical body: **Jas. 2:26:** “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

(iii) Separation between man and God as a result of sin is “spiritual death”:

Isa. 59:2: “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.”

Gen. 3:22-24: “Then the LORD God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever’; *23* therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. *24* So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.”

So what?

(4) All men are spiritually dead, separated from God by sin: Rom. 3:23; 6:23

(5) All men are going to be raised from the dead and judged:

Acts 17:30-31: “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, *31* because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”

Jn. 5:25-29: “Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. *26* For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, *27* and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. *28* Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice *29* and come forth; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”; 1 Cor. 15

2 Cor. 5:10: “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

Heb. 9:27: “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,”

Rom. 14:12: “So then each of us shall give account of himself to God.”

Read Rev. 20:11-21:8

D. **6** What is the most important thing in the world to you?

- (1) Wife, husband, children, family?
- (2) Car? (28 Thunderbirds), house, land?
- (3) Bank account, stock portfolio?
- (4) Keepsake? Mother's wedding ring?
- E. Through the use of a rhetorical question, Jesus Christ tells us what should be everyone's most important possession:
Matt. 16:26: *"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"*
- F. Jesus isn't seeking information with this question! The answer obvious!
 - (1) We all will appear before the judgment seat of Christ and give an answer for how we've lived our lives.
 - (2) Will your answer reflect you understood what Jesus was talking about when He said:
"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

2. **7** Hebrews 2:1-4:

- A. Our next rhetorical question was originally written to Jewish Christians, but is equally applicable to us.
 - (1) Those to whom it was originally addressed were converted from Judaism to Christ.
 - (2) They were people very well-acquainted with and very knowledgeable of the Old Testament; very proud of their "Jewish heritage." Turn to the book of Hebrews.
- B. There are two primary themes in the book of Hebrews:
 - (1) Danger of unbelief in Christ ("the prophet", Acts 3:12-25; **Heb. 3:12-4:1**)
 - (2) Superiority of Christ: the word "better" occurs 13 times in the book; Christ offers a better revelation, a better position, a better priesthood, a better covenant, a better hope, a better sacrifice, and a better and enduring possession (home in heaven) e.g., **Heb. 8:6:** *"But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises."*
- C. To set the immediate context of this rhetorical question we must begin in Chapter 1:1: the subject of entire chapter is the superiority of Christ.
 - (1) **8 1:1-3: superiority of Christ over the prophets:** "There is by the common consent of all, a very close and intimate connection between the character of the messenger and the weight and importance of his message. And hence the Apostle next proceeds to answer this question: to speak particularly of the incomparable majesty, glory, and perfections of Jesus Christ, as the Son of God." (Milligan, Robert. *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 45). Notice what is said of Jesus Christ:
Verses 1-3: *"God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 3 who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,"*

Notice what the Hebrew writer has just told his readers:

- (a) **v. 2:** Christ is better than the prophets, because He is God's appointed spokesman in the "last days,"
- (b) **v. 2:** Christ is better than the prophets, because He is "heir of all things, and through Him the worlds were made,"
- (c) **v. 3:** Christ is better than the prophets, because He manifests the "brightness" of God's glory and is the "express image of God's person" (i.e., If you really want to know who God is and what God is all about, you simply look to Jesus Christ!),

Jn. 8:19: "Then they said to Him, 'Where is Your Father?' Jesus answered, 'You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also.'"

- (d) **v. 3:** Christ is better than the prophets, because His word is mighty and through His word He "upholds" all things.

Col. 1:16-17: "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist."

Think about it, the whole universe is held together, the planets revolve around the Sun, the galaxies revolve around one another, the kingdoms of men rise and fall, the very molecules that make up our bodies are held together because **HE WILLS IT TO BE SO** through "...the word of His power"!

- (e) **v. 3:** And if that's not enough to blow our minds, Christ is better than the prophets, because through His bloody sacrifice on the cross He has purified us of our sins. Catch that image!! The Creator **ALLOWED** the creature, that which He created, to unjustly hang Him on a tree, so that He, the Creator could extend grace to the creation and rescue them from what they deserved...eternal damnation!! **Better?!**
- (f) **v. 3:** And having done all this, is it any wonder that Christ is better than the prophets, because He sits, as King of kings and Lord of Lords, "...at the right hand of the Majesty on high"? He sits at God's right hand on David's throne, as both Lord and Christ, Acts 2:36).

1:4-14: In these verses the apostle uses the Old Testament scriptures to prove the superiority of Christ over the angels:

vv. 4-14: "having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

5 For to which of the angels did He ever say:

'You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You'?

And again:

'I will be to Him a Father,
And He shall be to Me a Son'?

6 But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says:

'Let all the angels of God worship Him.'

7 And of the angels He says:

*'Who makes His angels spirits
And His ministers a flame of fire.'*

8 But to the Son He says:

*'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;
A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.
9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;
Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You
With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.'*

10 And:

*'You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth,
And the heavens are the work of Your hands.
11 They will perish, but You remain;
And they will all grow old like a garment;
12 Like a cloak You will fold them up,
And they will be changed.
But You are the same,
And Your years will not fail.'*

13 But to which of the angels has He ever said:

*'Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool?'*

14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?"

Notice what the Hebrew writer has just told his readers:

- (1) **v. 4-5:** Christ is better than the angels because He, by inheritance, obtained a more excellent name than they (v. 4-5),
- (2) **v. 6-7:** Christ is better than the angels, because angels are created beings, created by God to be His ministers, and they are required by God to worship Christ,
- (3) **v. 8-9:** On many occasions God's enemies were totally vanquished by one or more of God's angels. Thus, the angels are truly "very powerful and exalted beings." But, Christ is better than the angels because: "But to the Son He says: 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;'" Christ is divine, He is GOD! He rules!

Jesus is Eternal! Jesus is GOD! He sits on "...the throne of the universe, judging and governing it in truth and in righteousness." (both Lord and Christ, sits on David's throne, Acts 2) (quotations from: Milligan, Robert. *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 45),

Jn. 8:56-58: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad."
57 Then the Jews said to Him, 'You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?'
58 Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.'"

- (4) **v. 10-12:** Christ is better than the angels, because Christ is Creator, He is eternal, He will **BE** when all the heavens and earth have perished. The same cannot be said of angels or any other created thing,

- (5) **v. 13:** Christ is better than the angels, because He is equal with God as He sits at God's "right hand" (Phil. 2:6: "...did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.")
- (6) **v. 14:** Angels are certainly important in God's order of things since they minister to us, to those "who will inherit salvation."

But, in stark contrast, it was Christ who made salvation possible "...when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high." (v. 3).

Acts 4:12: "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

D. 9 Now let's stop and briefly recap what we have learned:

- ✓ Christ is better than the prophets. He is God's spokesman in the "last days."
- ✓ Christ is better than the prophets because He is the "heir of all things" and "He made the worlds."
- ✓ Christ is better than the prophets because He is the "the express image" of God's person, because He is God! If you really want to know who God is and what God is all about, you MUST look to Jesus Christ!
- ✓ Christ is better than the prophets, because through His word all things are held together.
- ✓ Christ is better than the prophets, because He purged us of our sins by allowing that which He created to kill Him!
- ✓ **10** Christ is better than the angels, because He is God's only begotten Son.
- ✓ Christ is better than the angels, because God requires the angels to worship Him.
- ✓ Christ is better than the angels, because He sits on God's throne ruling the universe, ruling and judging in God's kingdom.
- ✓ Christ is better than the angels, because He is the Creator, He is eternal, and He now sits at God's right hand.

E. 11 Now put yourself in the mind of a first century Jewish Christian. What would be their reaction? Totally blown away! That's some really heavy stuff!!

Think! To these Jewish Christians...

- (1) Moses and the prophets were held in the highest esteem.
- (2) They highly revered the angels; for example, the angel that ministered to Abraham, or the one that appeared to Moses in the burning bush, or the angels that guided Elijah or the angel that shut the mouths of the lion's and delivered Daniel.
- (3) But the Hebrew writer has made it clear to them that Christ is not only better than Moses and the prophets, He is better than the angels, He is equal to God! He is eternal! He is God! He freed us from sin by allowing the creature to kill the Creator on the cross! And not only this, but...
- (4) This "better one" has "spoken to us"!
- (5) Put all these factors together, and now read the rhetorical question the Hebrew writer uses to make his conclusion: **

Heb. 2:1-4: "Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those

who heard Him, 4 God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?"

- (6) **12** What happened to people that did not follow the instructions given by God's prophets?
- (7) What happened to people that did not follow the instructions given by God's angels?
- (8) If their word "...proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward," What about failing to hear and act on the "certified" word of Jesus and His apostles?
- (9) Do you really think anyone can escape judgement?
 - ✓ Do you really think, in view of what all Jesus Christ is and what He has done, that on that Great Day God will say to some, "Oh, it's alright that you would rather watch *The Bachelorette* or *Game of Thrones* or *House of Cards*; or play *Grand Theft Auto* or *Call of Duty* than read the words of My appointed spokesman. BTW: I went to great lengths to deliver to you.
 - ✓ "Oh, I don't need to attend every service; I'm plenty strong enough."
 - ✓ "Don't sweat it. No problem. That's OK."
 - ✓ "And, it's alright that you didn't obey the gospel, that you didn't care that He died for you, that you didn't care that He purged your sins, and asks so very little in return."
 - ✓ "No, I'll just overlook all of your self-induced ignorance and unbelief and just usher you right through those pearly gates."
- (10) Do you really think judgement day will be that way?

2 Cor. 5:9-11: "Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. 10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 11 Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men;"

Heb. 10:31: "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

III. CONCLUSION:

1. There's no need to spend much time on a conclusion.
2. The answer to rhetorical questions are obvious to anyone with any ounce of common sense.

Matt. 16:26: "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"

Heb. 2:1-4: "Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, 4 God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?"

3. You know the answer to all these questions.
 - A. The question is this: "Will you take the necessary action?"
 - B. If you're a Christian not living as you should, repent! Do better! God will help you!
 - C. If you are not a Christian, why delay? Obey Him NOW!