



JESUS

THE RIDDLER

"RIDDLE ME THIS"

The power of ambiguity in the gospels

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41 Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: **42** “What do you think of the Messiah?^[c] Whose son is he?” They said to him, “The son of David.” **43** He said to them, “How is it then that David by the Spirit^[d] calls him Lord, saying,

44 ‘The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit at my right hand,
until I put your enemies under your feet”’?

45 If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?” **46** No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

Matthew 22

John 16:25

25 “I have said these things to you in riddles. The hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in riddles, but will tell you plainly of the Father.

Mark 1:22 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

22 They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Mark 6:2 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

2 On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, “Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands!

Mark 8:21 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

21 Then he said to them, “Do you not yet understand?”

Proverbs 1:6 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

6 to understand a proverb and a figure,
the words of the wise and their riddles.

Introduction and Purpose

- Jesus used riddles to:
 - Establish his authority as a teacher
 - Communicate his message
- Understanding Jesus' use of riddles
 - Helps us understand the way his contemporaries thought about him
 - Helps us understand the way Jesus thought about the kingdom of God
- Purpose of this Bible Study series will be:
 - To explore riddling in the Bible
 - Deepen our understanding of the literary form used in antiquity
 - Gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of Jesus' language

Riddles used in Western culture

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall;
All the king's horses and all the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty together again.

This thing all things devours:
birds, beasts, trees, flowers;
Gnaws iron, bites steel; grinds hard stones to meal;
Slays king, ruins town, And beats high mountain down.

*What walks on four legs in the morning
two legs in the afternoon
three legs in the evening
and no legs at night?*

-presented to Oedipus Rex by the Sphinx in Greek Mythology

A little informer,
Clothed in bright armour,
Beloved by men of degree;
It goes fine and neat,
Without leg or feet,
Now tell me what this riddle must be.

Tho' of great age
I'm kept in a Cage
Having a long tail and one ear,
My mouth it is round
And when Joys do abound
O' then I sing wonderful clear.

Ambiguity

- When you make statements that are ambiguous, you confuse the reader and hinder the meaning of the text for a reason. However, sometimes ambiguity is used deliberately to add humor to a text.
- 3 forms of ambiguity
 - LEXICAL AMBIGUITY
 - Words have more than one meaning – Bank (River bank, Bank/money, Bank (roller coaster), Bank of computers)
 - SYNTACTICAL AMBIGUITY
 - Grammatical placement -Bob hit the man with the stick (Did Bob hit the man with the stick, or a man with a stick was hit by Bob?)
 - INFLECTIVE AMBIGUITY
 - Both lexical and syntactical- "A report showing the product of our marketing campaign for our accounting software product". Word used twice in different contexts with the sentence.



Difference between a riddle and a poem

- A riddle is like a question version of a poem. Riddles get you thinking and begs you for an answer. Here is an easy example of a riddle:
 - What get's wetter and wetter the more it dries?
- A poem doesn't often pose a question that is begging for an answer rather it is normally there for beauty, sound and wonder rather than a mind bender.
- They both employ rhythmic sound, emotion and reflection.
- Riddles are more ambiguous. (multiple meanings and unclear)
 - John 1:15 He cried out, saying, *“This is He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me.’”*

Difference between a riddle and a parable

- A parable is a short narrative illustrating a lesson (usually religious/moral) by comparison or analogy (Parable of the prodigal son)
- A riddle is a verbal puzzle, or mystery requiring intellect.

Why Study Jesus' Riddles?

- Scholars have overlooked riddles
- Missed meanings and deeper truths
- To learn the language of the wise and antiquity

Ready?



Lets begin with Riddles...

- All riddles ask a question and seeks an answer from the audience.

What is put on a table,
cut,
but never eaten?

- Clever, and multiple meanings of the word cut.
- Hidden meaning

“Whoever Has Ears”

- What does this mean to you, when you hear this?
- _____
- Do you have the right ears to hear?
- ***He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches***” ([Revelation 2:11](#) – NASB)
- Jesus said this 7 times in the book of Revelation.
- All throughout the Bible this term is used.

“Whoever Has Ears”

- *“You have neither heard nor understood; from of old your ears have not been open. Well do I know how treacherous you are; you were called a rebel from birth.”* (Isaiah 48:8);
- *“Hear this, you foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear.”* (Jeremiah 5:21);
- *“To whom can I speak and give warning? Who will listen to me? Their ears are closed so they cannot hear. The word of the Lord is offensive to them; they find no pleasure in it.”* (Jeremiah 6:10);
- *“Son of man, you are living among a rebellious people. They have eyes to see but do not see and ears to hear but do not hear, for they are a rebellious people.”* (Ezekiel 12:2).

“Whoever Has Ears”

- Jesus said “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me.” (John 6:44-45).
 - **When you are drawn to God, rejoice because you heard HIM.**
 - If a sermon, a song, a scripture, a lesson, anything that draws you to God closer or pulls you, you have heard his voice. It may not be as recognizable as two humans talking because God is Spirit! Spirit talks a different language. A language that is not understood by mere mortals, but an intrinsic holy pulling causing you to repentance, humility, forgiveness and liberation.

“Whoever Has Ears”

- Isaiah 32:1-4 “See, a king will reign in righteousness and rulers will rule with justice. Each one will be like a shelter from the wind and a refuge from the storm, like streams of water in the desert and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land. *Then* the eyes of those who see will no longer be closed, and *the ears of those who hear will listen. The fearful heart will know and understand*, and the stammering tongue will be fluent and clear.”
- **God gives you ears to hear. Rejoice that you can hear and understand.**
- The ones whom the Father draws to Jesus are now *able* to be taught by God, to hear the Father, to learn from Him, and to know and understand is that their ears have been opened so that they can listen to Him.

“Whoever Has Ears”

- When God speaks to us and gives us “Ears to Hear,”
- We are to follow Jesus’ example and be willing to be teachers to mixed audiences comprised of those who have ears to hear and those who do not. We are not to let those who do not have ears to hear prevent those who do have ears to hear from hearing what God wants us to say.

“Whoever Has Ears”

- Does this just mean, listening and understanding?
- Mark uses three instances of “whoever has ears”.
- He uses these instances to identify riddling sessions where Jesus asks or answers intentionally ambiguous questions.
- We are going to deal with Mark 8:18 only tonight for time purposes.

Mark 8 – Riddling session

- Leading up to Mark 8, - Mark 6:33-44 opens up with a feeding of four thousand people. (different than the five thousand)
- After the feeding by Chef Jesus, the Pharisees debate and test him.
 - They demanded a sign from heaven (8:11)
 - One could argue that the feeding of four thousand with seven loaves of bread was a sign.
 - Maybe, the Pharisees were not there to witness it and only heard.
 - Maybe, the Pharisees thought this was some skill that came from the devil. (Mark 3:22)
 - Jesus angry says only a perverse generation seeks a sign and leaves the region. (v.13)

Mark 8 – Riddling session

- Jesus still fuming from the encounter heads to Bethsaida on the other side of the lake (Mark 8:13,22)
- He then cries out – “Watch out! Watch for the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod!” (8:15)
- The disciples, probably because of their hasty departure, did not make it to the bakery that day and had only one loaf of bread with them (8:14)
- Hearing what Jesus just said, they began to argue about their current situation.

Mark 8 – Riddling session

- Who was supposed to get bread? Not me? I didn't know Jesus was just going to storm off like that!
- Jesus overhears them:
 - 17 And becoming aware of it, Jesus said to them, “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? 18 Do you have eyes, and fail to see? **Do you have ears, and fail to hear?** And do you not remember? 19 When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?” They said to him, “Twelve.” 20 “And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?” And they said to him, “Seven.” 21 Then he said to them, “Do you not yet understand?”

Mark 8 – Riddling session

- Jesus is frustrated with them.
 - “leaven” was used as a metaphor for the Pharisees teaching.
 - It is obvious to us, but not to them.
- How many times God has clearly told you or showed you that he is a provider, but you still worry. You still try to figure out why this has happened to you?
- The term “leaven of the Pharisees” and the “leaven of Herod” should have made it plain that he was not talking about loaves of bread yet, the disciples ignored these words because they were into the blame game.

Mark 8 – Riddling session

- The disciples were examples of how we are at times.
 - Misinterpreting the riddle (possible responses from the disciples)
 - “He is mad because we didn’t bring enough bread.”
 - “Jesus does not want us to buy bread from the Pharisees or Herodians anymore!”
 - “The Herodians put poison in the leaven. Don’t eat it.”

Mark 8 – Riddling session

- 17 And becoming aware of it, Jesus said to them, “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? 18 Do you have eyes, and fail to see? **Do you have ears, and fail to hear?** And do you not remember? 19 When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?” They said to him, “Twelve.” 20 “And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?” And they said to him, “Seven.” 21 Then he said to them, “Do you not yet understand?”
- Isn't it obvious that Jesus could make all the bread he wants?
- To the seven churches **** Revelation 2 - on

Mark 8 – Riddling session

- The deeper meaning is that this miracle as with all of Jesus' miracles point to him as Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus does what only God can do. He continues to provide bread for the people in the wilderness, just as God provided manna for the Israelites. And the disciples are worried about only having one loaf of bread?
- The key word here is "remember." Jesus says, "Don't you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" "Twelve," they replied. "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" They answered, "Seven." He said to them, "Do you still not understand?" (Mark 8:18-21)

Mark 8 – Riddling session

- What he has done in the past, he will continue to do in the present and in the future. And so if Christ has saved you, if he has brought you to God and provided all that you need in the past, you do not need to worry about the future. Jesus fed the multitude twice. God provided for an entire nation in the wilderness for forty years! And God can take care of you and me.

Mark 8 – Riddling session

- Have you been worrying over God's provision lately? These are difficult economic times, and some of us are feeling financial pressures like never before. We need to take this second feeding of the multitude to heart.
- Remember! Remember who Jesus is and what he has done.
- Don't just look at the feeding of the four thousand and say, "What a neat miracle!" Don't be like the Pharisees looking for a sign when Christ has already come. Don't be like the disciples wondering if Jesus can do it again and just focusing on the physical bread. Dig deeper, and see the deeper meaning behind the miracle. Jesus is God. He has not changed. What he has done before, he can do again. He has promised to meet your every need, and he will continue to do so.