

**Title:** Jesus Asks A Riddle

**Object:** A sponge, a hand towel, and a glove.

**Scripture:** “And when he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to him as he was teaching, and said, ‘By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?’ <sup>24</sup> Jesus answered them, ‘I also will ask you one question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. <sup>25</sup> The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?’” (Matthew 21:21-25)

**-S-** Do you like riddles? I have some riddles to ask you this morning. They aren't too difficult, but you will have to think a little. I will tell you this, I have the answer to each and every riddle right here in my bag -- and it will be something you have all seen before.

Here is the first riddle. **-S-** What holds water even though it is full of holes? If you think you know, raise your hand. I have the answer right here in my bag. **-S-** It is a sponge!

I have another riddle for you. **-S-** What gets wet when it is drying? Surely someone will guess this one. **-S-** It is a towel!

I have one more riddle. Now listen very closely. **-S-** When I am filled, I can work or play; when I am empty, I do nothing all day. What am I? That's a hard one, isn't it? **-S-** It's a glove. With your hand inside, it can do many things, but when it is empty, it can do nothing.

**-S-** I think Jesus must have liked riddles too. Sometimes He used a riddle to teach people a lesson. One day Jesus was teaching in the temple. The priests and elders of the temple didn't believe that Jesus was the Son of God and they were upset because he had been performing miracles.

**-S-** "Who gave you the authority to do these things?" they asked Jesus.

**-S-** Jesus said, "I will ask you a question and, if you can answer me, then I will answer you. Here's my question. Did the baptism of John come from heaven or from men? Where did he get his authority?"

**-S-** The priests couldn't answer Jesus' riddle. If they said it was from heaven, Jesus might ask them why they didn't believe John when he said that Jesus was the Son of God. And if they said it was from men, the people would turn against them because they believed that John was a prophet of God.

**-S-** The only way they could answer was, "We don't know."

Well, maybe the priests and elders didn't know who gave Jesus the authority to perform miracles, but we do. **-S-** It was God, His Heavenly Father!

Dear Lord, we thank You for sending us Jesus, Your only Son. And we thank You that You gave Him the power and authority to do all things. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## READING – Hosea 5

### -S- Resurrection Demands A Response

September 28, 2014

John 11:45-57

Sermon #65

The Apostle John defined his purpose for writing his gospel account in chapter 20,

-S- “Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”<sup>(John 20:30-31)</sup> John stays true to his purpose by writing this story that clearly demonstrated that Jesus is the Christ or God in the flesh.

### -S- Middle Ground?

At the time Jesus walked the earth it was a radical claim that He made, -S- “I and the Father are one.”<sup>(John 10:30)</sup> Even though the people had been waiting centuries for the Messiah, when He arrived they did not know what to think. -S- People then and people this day must either accept what the Bible and what Jesus claimed as true or reject Him. Let’s be honest there is no third neutral position that many want to claim. To be indifferent toward Jesus is in reality opposing Him. -S- Jesus addressed this very thought, saying, “He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters.”<sup>(Matthew 12:30)</sup> My beloved there is no middle ground; there never has been and there never will be. We have observed as we have worked our way through the Gospel of John that many who encountered Jesus were indifferent. They enjoyed the thrill of the miracles and the food they received. But, -S- they would soon be screaming “Crucify, crucify Him!”<sup>(Luke 23:21)</sup> All throughout the New Testament Jesus’ believers are the few, the remnant or as Jesus says, -S- “Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to

give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32) My beloved, the question is, **-S-** “Are we part of the Father’s “**little flock**” and a remnant church?” Lets see what we learn this morning about saving faith and being true believers.

We now come to the end of this four-part story recorded in John chapter 11. **-S-** Part one, Lazarus is ill. Martha and Mary send a messenger to Jesus. He waits two days to begin His journey to Bethany in order that the glory of God might be seen when He arrives. **-S-** Part two; we find Jesus has arrived outside of the village of Bethany. We observe both weak and strong faith. **-S-** Part three Jesus performs the miracle of raising a dead man from the grave back to life. This miracle demonstrated the glory of Jesus whom the Father had sent. **-S-** Part four the end of the story records various responses and the aftermath of the miracle. One would think - Jesus had just raised a dead man, who could complain about such a miraculous event? Well, lets see how people responded to the news of this miracle. We will break the ending of this story into **-S-** three parts: **-S-** Many with Mary, **-S-** Murder of One for the Many and **-S-** Many Seek Jesus.

### **-S-** Many with Mary

Read with me, verse 45 of John chapter 11, **-S-** “Therefore many of the Jews who came to Mary, and saw what He had done, believed in Him.” Saving faith is always placed “in” the Savior Jesus and in no other. When Thomas told Jesus that he did not know the way, Jesus responded, **-S-** “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; **no one comes to the Father but through Me.**” (John 14:6) However, we also know from the scriptures that not everyone who said they believed then or says they believe today in Jesus processes true saving faith. There are a number of scriptures that point this out, one of which is found in James, **-S-** “You believe that God is

one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.”<sup>(James 2:19)</sup> **-S-** Knowing there is a God and knowing the scriptures is not what saves. Salvation is a matter of the heart and soul. Here at this point in the story we take the Apostle John at face value, those who “believed in Him (*Jesus*)” are true believers. In context we know that there were those present who were followers of Christ and friends of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. The primary reason for Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead was as Jesus said, **-S-** “Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”... and “so that they may believe that You (*God the Father*) sent Me.”<sup>(John 11:40 & 42)</sup> Paul tells the Corinthians and us plainly that the Lord is glorified when people truly believe and are saved. **-S-** “For all things *are* for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.”<sup>(2 Corinthians 4:15)</sup> The Jewish authorities viewed these believers as genuine by what we read that they said in verse 48, **-S-** “If we let Him (*Jesus*) go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.” Then John who called these people believers and contrasts them with the unbelievers who went and reported this miracle to the Pharisees. Finally, this miracle of raising Lazarus was so powerful and amazing even those opposed to Jesus admitted it was a miracle.

### **-S-** Murder of One for the Many

Lets begin reading from verse 46, **-S-** “But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them the things, which Jesus had done.”<sup>47</sup> Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, ‘What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. **-S-**<sup>48</sup> If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.’

<sup>49</sup> But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, ‘You

know nothing at all, **-S-**<sup>50</sup> nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish.’<sup>51</sup> Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, **-S-**<sup>52</sup> and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.<sup>53</sup> So from that day on they planned together to kill Him.”

Is it not uncommon that Jesus creates division wherever He taught and today wherever He is preached? Luke recorded Jesus’ words, **-S-** “Do you suppose that I came to grant peace on earth? I tell you, no, but rather division.”<sup>(Luke 12:51)</sup> So while some who were there understood the miracle and the meaning behind it and came to believe in Jesus as the Christ, others did not believe. Luke further clarified why this happens in chapter 16, Jesus is telling the story of the rich man and a different man called Lazarus, not the one in John chapter 11. The rich man is pleading with Abraham to send Lazarus back to his family so that they might believe. The rich man asks, **-S-** “I beg you, father, that you send him (*Lazarus*) to my father’s house—<sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’<sup>29</sup> But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’<sup>30</sup> But he (*the rich man*) said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ ” Now listen to what Jesus says Abraham’s response to the rich man is. **-S-**<sup>31</sup> “But he (*Abraham*) said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’ ”<sup>(Luke 16:27-31)</sup> So it was when Jesus raised this Lazarus from the dead as well.

**-S-** “The chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council”<sup>(v.47)</sup> in response to what they hear about Jesus. Let me take some time to help us understand what

this council is and who is involved and why it is important. The council referred to here is the Great Sanhedrin of Jerusalem and is made up of both Sadducees and Pharisees. Who are these two groups and what is the Sanhedrin?

First we will examine who the Pharisees are as this also lays a foundation for understanding the Sadducees. **-S-** The name “Pharisee” means to be separate. The roots of the Pharisees can be traced to the “Hasidim.” This name is the transliteration of a Hebrew word meaning “the pious.” The influence of Greek customs and ways began to threaten the preservation of Jewish patterns of life in the 3rd century B.C. Jews were required to employ the Greek language in their daily lives and with the language came the influence of Greek culture. This process was quite apparent in Palestine by the 2nd century B.C. and was one factor leading to the Maccabean revolt of 167 B.C. **-S-** The Jewish people responded in two opposing ways: one group was friendly to the Greeks; the other group set as their goal strict adherence to the principles of Judaism. The latter group, known as “the pious” or Hasideans, they cherished the ideals of responsible covenant observance holding to verses like Deuteronomy 7:9, **-S-** “Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments.” **-S-** During the period following the Maccabean revolt the Hasidim split into 3 religious orders – **-S-** Pharisees, **-S-** Sadducees and **-S-** Essenes. Little is known about the Essenes, but it is believed their name is derived from a Hebrew word meaning “Healers.” The Sadducees we will study shortly. The Pharisees are said to be closest to the original Hasidim. **-S-** The earliest historical reference to the Pharisees is found in Josephus’ narrative written about 145 B.C.

**-S-** By way of contrast with the Sadducees, who were drawn almost exclusively

from the aristocracy, the Pharisees largely were members of the middle class. They tended to be the businessmen, merchants and tradesmen of their day. This accounts for the large Talmudic material covering commercialism. The word **-S-** Talmud means, “to study,” or “to learn.” It is a body of literature in Hebrew and Aramaic, covering interpretations of legal portions of the Old Testament spanning a time period from shortly after Ezra at about 400 B.C. until approximately the mid 500s A.D.

**-S-** The average Pharisee had no formal education in the interpretation of the law and accordingly the Pharisees included professional scholars or scribes. Scribes handled legal matters while the main body was concerned with the “Oral Law” which, was of greater importance to them than the written law. **-S-** When one rabbi interprets the scriptures he writes tradition or “oral law.” Then when another rabbi interprets the former interpretation that creates a new law and the process goes on and on – moving gradually away from the Word of God. Sound familiar? Do we see this process in denominations today? **-S-** The Pharisees accepted the “Oral Law” along with the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, as equally inspired and authoritative. Much the same as the Catholics have developed extra biblical writings that they consider equal to the Bible.

Pharisees looked for the day when the evil regime of the present, especially the regime of the wicked Sadducees, would be dissolved and a glorious and righteous Israel would be inaugurated under their authority. **-S-** In the beginning they served this purpose with zeal and they hoped that by their efforts and out of their order the Messiah would come.

**-S-** The Sadducees were a Jewish sect that was more political than religious. This



sect ceased to exist in 70 A.D. with the demise of the aristocracy and the desolation of the Temple. They are known for their opposition to the larger sect, the Pharisees. They claimed that they were descendant from Aaron, a leading priest, under King David. **-S-** According to Josephus the Sadducees represented the wealthy class of Israel and in general disliked the Pharisees.

The high priest and the high priesthood consisted of Sadducees. **-S-** Little is known about what the Sadducees taught except by their opposition to the Pharisees.

Remember as the Apostle Paul stood before the Sanhedrin **-S-** “there occurred a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.”(Acts 23:7-8)

**-S-** The Sanhedrin or the council of Jerusalem constituted the highest Jewish authority in Israel prior to 70 A.D. The Great Sanhedrin that met in Jerusalem is distinguished from the lesser local courts of law, which the name “sanhedrin” was also given. **-S-** Rabbinic tradition, as recorded in the Mishnah, which is the written interpretations of the Law, traces the origin of the Sanhedrin back to God’s command to Moses to gather 70 men chosen from among the elders of Israel.

Although rabbinic tradition argues that the **-S-** Sanhedrin was composed entire of scholarly scribes and Pharisees we know that in truth, from history, that the Sanhedrin was dominated by Sadducee priests. Pharisees were admitted into the Sanhedrin in larger numbers under Herod the Great. Herod did this to limit the power of the Sadducees who opposed his rule. A Sanhedrin numbered 70, but the

**-S-** Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem numbered 71 with the High Priest serving as its head or president as recorded by Josephus and the New Testament. **-S-** The Sanhedrin interrupted Mosaic Law and its verdict was final. The Sanhedrin

functioned with some difficulty since the Sadducees and the Pharisees disliked each other and the Romans had limited its authority.

**-S-** Despite the dislike and conflict between the Sadducees and the Pharisees their hatred of Jesus was even greater. To deal with the growing threat of Jesus to their authority, position, status and hold they had over the people; they “convened a council.” **-S-** There was only one item on the agenda: What to do with Jesus? At risk was if the people followed Jesus and revolted against the Romans. They felt this would cost them their positions, wealth and they felt Jesus would bring an end to the Jewish nation. **-S-** “Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all, nor do you take into account that it is expedient for you that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation not perish.’”<sup>(v.49-50)</sup>

Joseph Caiaphas had been appointed high priest in A.D. 18 by the Roman prefect Valerius Gratus and continued as high priest until A.D. 36. **-S-** Caiaphas’ opening statement, “You know nothing at all” shows the aloof and rude attitude of the Sadducees towards the Pharisees. **-S-** He proposes the murder of Jesus as “expedient” and telling these men that had only two choices - murder Jesus for the sake of the Jewish people and the nation or let the nation perish. Jesus was threatening the status quo and they were concerned because Passover was approaching and Jerusalem would be filled with thousands of pilgrims.

After Caiaphas speaks the Apostle John records this interesting postscript, **-S-** “Now he did not say this on his own initiative, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.”<sup>(v.51-52)</sup> **-S-** The postscript “Now he did not say this on his own initiative” did not mean he was forced to say these things, but that God had a truer

meaning, a meaning not intended by Caiaphas. The true meaning was that Jesus would be crucified for the nation and that those who repented and believed would become the true children of God. **-S-** Thus, Caiaphas spoke words meant for wickedness and God turned them into truth. From Caiaphas view the “children of God who are scattered abroad” were the Jews living in other countries, the Diaspora. But in truth this meant that the Gentiles would be grafted into the family of God and become His children and would be His true and faithful church through believing in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

The council concludes. **-S-** “So from that day on they planned together to kill Him.”<sup>(v.53)</sup> From this we know that the decision to murder Jesus was made long before the Sanhedrin arrested Jesus. And it tells us that Jesus’ trial was a complete mockery of justice and was staged to give the appearance of justice, but His death sentence had already been given.

Verse 54 tells us, **-S-** “Therefore Jesus no longer continued to walk publicly among the Jews, but went away from there to the country near the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim; and there He stayed with the disciples.” **-S-** As God in the flesh, Jesus knew of the Sanhedrin’s plan to murder Him and He left the Jerusalem area until His time to suffer and die chosen by God the Father.

### **-S-** Many Seek Jesus

This incredible story draws to a close with verses 55 to 57. **-S-** “Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up to Jerusalem out of the country before the Passover to purify themselves.<sup>56</sup> So they were seeking for Jesus, and were saying to one another as they stood in the temple, ‘What do you think; that He will not come to the feast at all?’ **-S-**<sup>57</sup> Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had

given orders that if anyone knew where He was, he was to report it, so that they might seize Him.” This is the third and final Passover recorded in the Gospel of John. As the Passover approached the pilgrims began to crowd into Jerusalem swelling the population to as much as 1 million. **-S-** This story closes with the irony of the people purifying themselves while their leaders in secret ruthlessly plotted the death of the Lamb of God who was blameless and had been sent by God to bring the people back to Him. The leaders defiled themselves, while many of the people sought Jesus, accepted Him as the Messiah and were saved.

**-S-** The resurrection of Lazarus forced people to decide what they believed about Jesus. Many responded in faith and others were hostile. Even those who were indifferent had, in truth, rejected the Son of God, the Messiah. These Jewish leaders had forgotten the words of Joshua, **-S-** “Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but **-S-** as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.” (Joshua 24:14-15) It is my prayer for us, as family, as brothers and sisters of the house of God that “we will serve the LORD.” Let us never forget what God has done through our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ!