

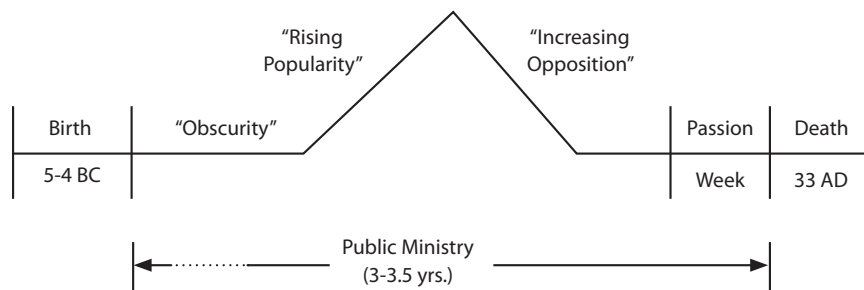
SESSION 4

Increasing Opposition

I. PRAYER/REVIEW

II. ABBREVIATED TIMELINE: LIFE OF CHRIST

A. Key Chart



B. Key Words:

OBSCURITY → POPULARITY → OPPOSITION

III. "OPPOSITION" PHASE

The suggested movements in Jesus' life were not clearly delineated. Even during His rise to popularity, there would be times of resistance to His words and works. Some of Jesus' opposition was due to rejection of His teaching authority, some to His miracles performed on the Sabbath. Some opposition was due to ignorance or inability to see Jesus as more than just a traveling teacher.

This lesson will present several Biblical stories that illustrate the opposition that will eventually lead to rejection of Him or plotting against His life.

IV. BIBLICAL DEVELOPMENT

A. Opposition by Religious Leaders

1. Religious leadership in New Testament

Religious Leaders of the New Testament Era

- 1) Levites: descendants of Levi, one of twelve sons of Jacob/Israel. They did not receive tribal allotments in the land but were designated as helpers, assistants to priests.
- 2) Priests: also Levites but more narrowly descendants of Aaron, the first High Priest (and brother of Moses). The priests offered daily sacrifices and conducted other religious functions.
- 3) High Priest: oversaw Temple worship and other priestly and administrative duties; entered the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) to offer sacrifices for the whole nation.
- 4) Scribes: also called “teachers of the law” or “lawyers.” They studied the law of Moses as to interpretation and application; they were respected teachers.
- 5) Sadducees: priestly aristocrats who supported the Hasmonean dynasty. They (in the time of Jesus) controlled the priesthood and dominated Jewish political life. They embraced the Pentateuch (Law of Moses) as fully inspired and authoritative; denied immortality of soul/resurrection as well as existence of angels or spirits.
- 6) Pharisees: pious Jews who likely arose from the Hasidim (who fought with the Maccabees during Hebrew Independence of 2nd century, BC). Probably the Pharisees were more middle-class, involved mostly in synagogue communities. Pharisees held to strict adherence to Torah and the traditions (added regulations) of the Elders. They were strict and separatistic; they longed for the coming Messiah.
- 7) Herodians: supporters of the pro-Roman Herodian dynasty.

2. Examples of religious leaders' **opposition**

a. Due to "blasphemy"

Mark 2:1-12

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home.² They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.³ Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them.⁴ Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on.⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."⁶ Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves,⁷ "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"⁸ Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things?⁹ Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk?'¹⁰ But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man,¹¹ "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."¹² He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Notes:

- (1) Occurs during the course of a miraculous healing (Jesus' authority over infirmities/ paralysis).
- (2) A startling pronouncement of sins forgiven precede the actual miracle.
- (3) The "teachers of the law" were thinking that Jesus' pronouncement was blasphemous for only God can forgive sin.

- (4) In His unanswered question, Jesus affirms that He has authority to heal and the authority to forgive sins. Both authorities are compatible with Jesus' Kingdom-power.
- (5) The effect upon the onlookers was amazement.

b. Due to rejection of Jesus' true identity

Matthew 12:22-31

Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. ²³All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" ²⁴But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons." ²⁵Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. ²⁶If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? ²⁷And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. ²⁸But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²⁹"Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house. ³⁰"Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. ³¹And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven."

Notes:

- (1) The healing of a blind-and-dumb, possessed man raised questions in the mind of the multitudes. Could this be the Messiah (as framed in the text, the expected answer is "no")?
- (2) The Pharisees (Matthew 12) and scribes (Mark 3) attributed the miracle-working to Satanic, demonic power. This is "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit," an unforgivable sin.

(3) Jesus pointed out the obvious inconsistency of the assertion. If Jesus frees a man from demonic possession by demonic power, how can such a kingdom survive?

c. Due to exposing their hypocrisy (over traditions)

Luke 11:37-48

When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table.³⁸ But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal.³⁹ Then the Lord said to him, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.⁴⁰ You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also?⁴¹ But now as for what is inside you—be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.⁴² "Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.⁴³ "Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces.⁴⁴ "Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it."⁴⁵ One of the experts in the law answered him, "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also."⁴⁶ Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.⁴⁷ "Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your ancestors who killed them.⁴⁸ So you testify that you approve of what your ancestors did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs."

Notes:

(1) Jewish tradition (not Biblical law) had developed elaborate and extensive customs of washings and prayers during a feast-meal. Jesus did not always follow these religious expectations.

- (2) Jesus took the opportunity to point out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and Scribes.
- (3) The end result was the ever-hardening of opposition to Jesus.

Luke 11:53-54

When Jesus went outside, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions,⁵⁴ waiting to catch him in something he might say.

Insight: "Traditions" (Later Writings)

"In Jesus' day, the teachings of the Scribes were a body of **oral traditions** memorized and passed down from generation to generation." (Strauss, 143; emphasis mine). After the time of Christ, further studies produced unique Jewish documents.

- 1) Mishnah: means "repetition"; a body of rabbinic rulings (ca. AD 200) on applying the Torah to everyday life; the goal of the Mishnah was to build a fence around the Law to protect pious Jews from breaking the Torah's commandments.
- 2) Talmud: means "learning"; in time (3rd to 5th cent. AD) later rabbis added their comments to the Mishnah and the resultant body of teachings were called the Gemara ("completion"). Together the Gemara and the Mishnah make up the Talmud.

d. Due to His (Jesus') teachings

John 7:11-31

Now at the festival the Jewish leaders were watching for Jesus and asking, "Where is he?"¹² Among the crowds there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, "He is a good man." Others replied, "No, he deceives the people."¹³ But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the leaders.¹⁴ Not until halfway

through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. ¹⁵The Jews there were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having been taught?" ¹⁶Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. ¹⁷Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. ¹⁸Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. ¹⁹Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?" ²⁰"You are demon-possessed," the crowd answered. "Who is trying to kill you?" ²¹Jesus said to them, "I did one miracle, and you are all amazed. ²²Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a boy on the Sabbath. ²³Now if a boy can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing a man's whole body on the Sabbath? ²⁴Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly." ²⁵At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill?" ²⁶Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Messiah? ²⁷But we know where this man is from; when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from." ²⁸Then Jesus, still teaching in the temple courts, cried out, "Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own authority, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, ²⁹but I know him because I am from him and he sent me." ³⁰At this they tried to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come. ³¹Still, many in the crowd believed in him. They said, "When the Messiah comes, will he perform more signs than this man?"

Notes:

- (1) The specific feast that Jesus attended was the "Feast of Tabernacles" (Jn 7:2; cf. Lev 23:33-44). If

Jesus died on the Cross in 33 AD, then this feast likely was September 10-17, 32 AD.

- (2) The Feast of Tabernacles (or Booths) was a popular harvest celebration which lasted a full week. Also connected to the festival was a commemoration of God's gracious provision for the Israelites in their wilderness wanderings.

Deuteronomy 16:13-17

Celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles for seven days after you have gathered the produce of your threshing floor and your winepress. ¹⁴Be joyful at your festival—you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites, the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns. ¹⁵For seven days celebrate the festival to the Lord your God at the place the Lord will choose. For the Lord your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your joy will be complete. ¹⁶Three times a year all your men must appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose: at the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks and the Festival of Tabernacles. No one should appear before the Lord empty-handed: ¹⁷Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you.

As MacArthur (p. 1553) notes, "Both a water-drawing and a lamp-lighting ceremony were featured."

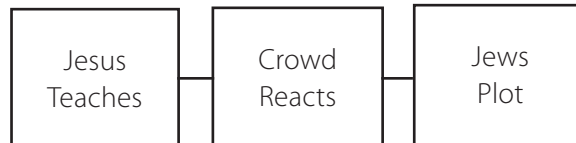
- (3) Jesus had been urged by His brothers to go to the Feast and show Himself, perform miracles for the crowds, be a public figure. Their reasoning was that Jerusalem/Judea was the best place to launch a messianic campaign, not the backward area of Galilee. The advice was sound from a worldly point of view but not what Jesus was committed to do.

- (4) So, Jesus remained a few days in Galilee before departing secretly for the Feast in Jerusalem. Yet at the festival the crowds were watching for Him, "Where is that man?" (7:11). Public opinion was divided: some declaring Jesus a good man, others that He was a deceiver of the people.
- (5) At the midpoint of the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus went to the temple to formally teach, His first formal discourse in the region of Judea (in Jerusalem, the home of the religious leaders). His instruction caught the attention of the Jews (i.e. Jewish leaders).

John 7:15

The Jews there were amazed and asked, "How did this man get such learning without having been taught?"

- (6) The flow of events around this story is best seen as diagrammed below:



This temple teaching was explosive and divisive. Some of the crowd will believe Jesus is the Messiah; others will attempt to seize Him (to do harm); the leaders ("the Jews") will plot to kill Him, a known fact by many ("Isn't this the man they are trying kill?" - 7:25).

- (7) The teachings from John 7:16-34

Section One (16-19): the origin of Jesus' authority

- (a) Not His own (16)
- (b) Rather, from the One who sent Him (16)
- (c) Only the obedient (submissive) to God's will can truly know Jesus' authority.

- (d) If one claims submissiveness to Mosaic Law, why plot to kill Jesus?

Section Two (21-24): healing on the Sabbath
(cf. Jn 5 – Pool of Bethesda)

- (a) Permissible to circumcise on the Sabbath
- (b) Why not permissible to heal on Sabbath
("stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment.") (7:24)

Section Three (28-29): the origin of the Messiah

- (a) Some believed the Messiah would suddenly appear
- (b) Jesus again affirmed that He was sent (from God)

Section Four (33-34):

- (a) Jesus would be with the people a short time
- (b) Jesus would leave
- (c) Jesus could not be followed

Last and greatest day of the Feast of Tabernacles:

John 7:37-44

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink."³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."³⁹ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.⁴⁰ On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet."⁴¹ Others said, "He is the Messiah." Still others asked, "How can the Messiah come from Galilee?"⁴² Does not Scripture say that the Messiah will come from David's descendants and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?"⁴³ Thus the people were divided because of Jesus.⁴⁴ Some wanted to seize him, but no one laid a hand on him.

Notes:

- (1) This teaching is distinct from the previous. It occurs on the last (perhaps 8th) day of the Feast. It was the climax of the festival.
- (2) The background:

Insight: (from Bock, 459)

In the background was the daily provision of water during the Feast of Tabernacles, whereby the priest would gather water from the pool of Siloam in a golden flagon and bring it, after a procession, to the temple amid sounds of trumpets and rejoicing. There the water was poured into a bowl beside the altar, where a tube would bring it to the altar's base. This act thanked God for his provision of the past and expressed hope for his future provision. If the final day was the eighth day of the feast, then Jesus spoke of an unending provision on the day when the symbolism ended.

- (3) After pouring out of literal water, Jesus takes advantage of the occasion to boldly declare a radical idea. Note the diagram (to capture the spiritual meaning):



Isaiah 55:1-2

"Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. ² Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare."

John 4:10-14 (woman at the well)

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would

have asked him and he would have given you living water.”¹¹ “Sir,” the woman said, “you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?”¹³ Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

John 7:38

“Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.”

- (4) As a result of this final Feast of Tabernacles teaching, the crowd was divided over His person. Some said He “is the Prophet” (cf. Deut. 18); others “He is the Christ.” Still others were unconvinced—Jesus’ origins did not fit their expectations of the Coming Messiah.
- (5) The ultimate irony came when the religious leaders sent temple guards to arrest Jesus. They returned empty-handed.

John 7:45-47

Finally the temple guards went back to the chief priests and the Pharisees, who asked them, “Why didn’t you bring him in?”⁴⁶ “No one ever spoke the way this man does,” the guards replied.⁴⁷ “You mean he has deceived you also?” the Pharisees retorted.

- e. Due to His questionable “authority”

Matthew 21:23-27

Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”²⁴ Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If

you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁵ *John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin? They discussed it among themselves and said, 'If we say, 'From heaven,' he will ask, 'Then why didn't you believe him?'* ²⁶ *But if we say, 'Of human origin'—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet."* ²⁷ *So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." Then he said, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things."*

Notes:

- (1) This controversy occurred in the middle of the last week of Jesus' earthly life (Passion week).
- (2) The location was "the temple courts" where recently Jesus had overturned the tables of the moneychangers.
- (3) The antagonists were the "chief priests" and "the elders of the people."
- (4) The point of contention was Jesus' authority, especially so in light of cleansing the temple and other Messianic acts. The question was direct: "Who gave you this authority?" (23)
- (5) Jesus replied with a question about John's authority and baptism. Was it from heaven or men?
 - (a) To say from heaven (God) would invite a follow-up question, "Then why didn't you believe him?"
 - (b) To say from man would invite the displeasure of the listening crowd who thought John to be a prophet.
- (6) The religious leaders deliberated and eventually said, "We don't know." (27)
- (7) Jesus then refused to answer their question (as he noted earlier).

Insight: (from Bock, 324):

The question of authority rests in these two options: either the leadership or Jesus expresses the way to know God. The consistent presentation of Jesus' upper hand in these controversies provides another ground for the answer to the choice posed by the leaders' question. Jesus' responses and work show that he has divinely bestowed authority.

B. Questions (Entrapments) by Religious Leaders

1. By Pharisees and Herodians

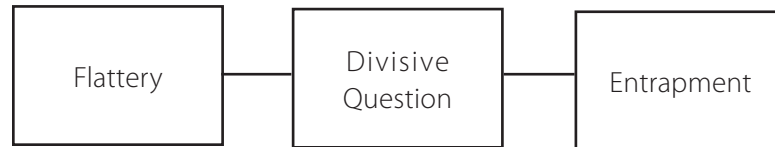
Matthew 22:15-22 (cf. Mk 12:13-17; Lk 20:20-26)
Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. ¹⁶They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. ¹⁷Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?" ¹⁸But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? ¹⁹Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, ²⁰and he asked them, "Whose image is this? And whose inscription?" ²¹"Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "So give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." ²²When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

Notes:

- a. The Pharisees and Herodians (Luke refers to them as "spies") band together to entrap Jesus with a question that could be the political basis to take Him to the Roman governor.
- b. The Pharisees would have opposed this hated Roman poll tax. The Herodians generally went along with the tax as long as they supported Rome's choice for a governor or ruler over them. The fact

that they could work together shows the intensity of opposition to Jesus.

c. The entrapment strategy could be seen as follows:



d. The issue: "Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" (17)

e. The possible replies:

(a) Yes: would show Jesus sided with the Roman authorities, thus losing credibility with the people.

(b) No: would show Jesus defied the authority of Rome, was a rebel and liable to charges of lawlessness (as well as offending the Herodians).

f. Jesus' response

(a) Give me a coin (demonstrating that His accusers lived with/by Roman currency/ coinage).

(b) Whose inscription is it? (obviously Caesar's).

(c) Then give Caesar what belongs to Caesar; give to God what belongs to God. This teaching recognizes appropriate spheres belonging to government (cf. Ro 13) and to God.

2. By Sadducees

Matthew 22:23-33 (cf. Mk 12:18-27; Lk 20:27-40)

That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. ²⁴ "Teacher," they said, "Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for him. ²⁵ Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. ²⁶ The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down

to the seventh.²⁷ Finally, the woman died.²⁸ Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?"²⁹ Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.³⁰ At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.³¹ But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you,³² 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."³³ When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.

Notes:

- a. The Sadducees attempt to entrap Jesus by a theological question on the resurrection, a doctrine rejected by the Sadducees.
- b. To trap Jesus the Sadducees create a hypothetical situation about the "supposed resurrection." The example is to show the absurdity of the resurrection doctrine and entrap Jesus in the process.
- c. The background of the situation: a woman dies and the Mosaic teaching of Levirate marriage is invoked.

But the story continues. Each subsequent son (seven in all) dies.

Insight: Levirate marriage

Deuteronomy 25:5-6

If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her.⁵ The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.

The purpose of this provision for the widow was to secure for her inheritance rights through her heir, a means of providing family and care for the widow.

- d. The tricky question (from Sadducees): So, in the (supposed) resurrection, whose wife is she among the seven?
- (1) The Sadducees thought the absurdity of the question would disprove the doctrine as well as Jesus' authority as a teacher.
 - (2) The Sadducees were sadly mistaken.
- e. The reply of Jesus
- (1) The Sadducees themselves were wrong ("in error") on two accounts:
 - (a) they didn't understand the Scriptures;
 - (b) they didn't understand the power of God.
 - (2) Resurrection life will not be like earthly life:
 - (a) There will be no marriage.
 - (b) The resurrected will be like angels (the existence Sadducees denied).
 - (c) The resurrected will not die anymore (Lk 20:36).
 - (3) Proof text on resurrection (Ex 3:6)

Matthew 22:32
"...I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead but of the living."

Insight:

God as Promise-Giver is also a Promise-Keeper. To give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob promises and they not be alive (by resurrection) to receive them would be to devalue God's word of promise-fulfillment.

Further, to say "I am" as opposed to "I was" adds further strength to the idea of resurrection.

- (4) The response of the crowd

Matthew 22:33
When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.

3. By a Scribe

Mark 12:28-34 (cf. Matt 22:34-40)

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"²⁹ "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.'³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'³¹ The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself: There is no commandment greater than these.'³² "Well said, teacher," the man replied. "You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him.³³ To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."³⁴ When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

Notes:

- a. The Scribe was a Pharisee (Matt 22:30-35), chosen to pose a question of Jesus. Matthew notes that the Scribe was "testing" Jesus, although he had noted that Jesus had handled the Sadducean test well.
- b. Apparently in the religious community this question had been posed and debated. Jewish thought had codified the law into 248 commandments and 365 prohibitions (i.e. 613 precepts to obey). So, of all these, which is the greatest, the weightiest?
- c. The question of the Scribe: "Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" (36)
- d. The reply of Jesus:
 - (1) Love God with one's whole person (Deut 6:4-5).
 - (2) Love your neighbor as yourself (Lev 19:18).
- e. The Scribe's reply to Jesus' answer:

The scribe replied that Jesus answered rightly. By doing so he showed his agreement and

appreciation of Jesus' response. Seeing this, Jesus noted:

Mark 12:34

When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

4. By Nicodemus: a member of the Sanhedrin
Nicodemus came to Jesus early in His public ministry. He was not antagonistic but had personal questions to ask of Jesus. His interest was not to trap or criticize but to learn and ponder. He acknowledged that Jesus was a man from God.
 - a. The introduction
John 3:1-2
Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. ²He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him."
 - b. The surprising statement of Jesus
John 3:3
Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."
 - c. The clarification (due to Nicodemus' lack of understanding)
John 3:5-8
Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. ⁶Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' ⁸The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

- d. The bottom-line teaching (for Nicodemus and all)

John 3:16-18

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

V. TAKE AWAYS

A. Opposition

Increasing opposition characterized the unfolding public ministry of Jesus. It would also follow His disciples as well. Note the somber warning that Jesus gave the “faithful eleven” in the Upper Room.

John 15:18-21

“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. ²⁰Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. ²¹They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.”

B. Persecution

Jesus had spoken of persecution in the Beatitudes (from the Sermon on the Mount).

Matthew 5:10-12

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”

The Apostle Paul also echoed this sentiment in Romans 12. After carefully explaining salvation (justification by faith not works), he began his “practical “ follow-up with the strong urging to offer one’s life to God, to no longer conform to the world’s pattern but be transformed by the renewing of the mind (12:12). Then, he spoke of the obligation of love (12:9-21) and included this thought:

Romans 12:14-15

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

C. A Higher Call

Hebrews 12:1-3

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us,² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Benediction

(Heb 13:20-21)

Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep,²¹ equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.

Amen.