

# Does God Go Silent?

Matthew 21:23-27

**MPS** Jesus reveals His worthiness as God for faith, but He is not obligated to satisfy our unbelief.

**OBJ** Every person should believe in Jesus to confess their sin and receive His forgiveness and cleansing because of the only answer to the problems of unbelief.

## INTRO

Have you ever been subject to the “silent treatment”? A common strategy that can be very effective.

How many of you have felt like you were getting the “silent treatment” from God? You pray and you ask, but you never feel like you hear from Him. Have you ever felt this way?

I want to ask today, “Does God go silent?”

## READ Matthew 21:23-27

*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?” And they discussed it among themselves, saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’<sup>26</sup> But if we say, ‘From man,’ we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet.”<sup>27</sup> So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And he said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. **Matthew 21:23-27***

It’s been a really intense week of following Jesus for the disciples, full of one life-changing lesson after another. But its about to get worse. As we acknowledged at the beginning of this “Gospel Lessons” series, Jesus is focused on the Father’s mission for Him in Jerusalem, and He is wasting no time nor allowing any distraction to deter him.

Jesus enters the Temple, his daily practice of dropping in to say “hi” to all of his biggest haters. And they never disappoint. The religious leaders were also on a mission, to undo the Father’s mission. But they didn’t see it that way. There is a major conflict brewing among the chief priests and elders. They are so bent on discrediting Jesus that they have become tunnel-visioned by hate and anger. We know from Nicodemus’ words, many of them believed Jesus was from God. And though they existed in a system that purported to serve God, it became very obvious by every encounter with Jesus that the two had very little in common. The religious system had become so convoluted that the leaders didn’t know how to navigate the tensions. Looking back its very easy for us to see, but in real time it was far more complex than we could understand. What we can understand is what we must understand today.

**Jesus reveals His worthiness as God for faith, but He is not obligated to satisfy our unbelief.**

**The chief priests and elders approach Jesus while He is teaching in the Temple.** [23] This section begins a long series of controversial encounters (21:23-22:46) between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. This encounter is with the highest of all Jewish leaders, the chief priests. Along with them were the elders, lay leaders of the most influential families. They ask about the source of His authority for teaching. This is not an inherently controversial action. It was the religious leaders’ role to confirm that anyone who taught in the Temple had the proper authority to do so. And this was a good thing. Frankly, maybe THE biggest problem we have across Christianity today is the open access to listen to anyone that spends the most money to invade your algorithm with their Social Media hot-take reel. And once you click, they’ve got you. Familiar terms are used, the Bible gets some measure of recognition, and the message feels relevant because it “tickles” your needs and scratches your “itches” of life. **How could something that feels so right be wrong?** (As many of you are aware, this is not a new question!) We’ll return to this later. Their question comes from a position of responsibility, to guard the purity of the religion, but they use it as merely a cloak for their rejection and effort to discredit Jesus in front of the people.



**TRANS** Jesus knew that their intentions were to discredit Him, but He entertained their question anyway. Jesus was not attempting to avoid their question. Just the opposite, He wants to make sure that there is no uncertainty in who He is, the very reason the Jewish leaders avoid answering Him. In customary manner for teaching, Jesus responds to their question with a question that reveals the real issue. He agreed that if they would answer His question, then He would answer theirs.

**OBJ** Jesus' response reveals the **The Problems of Unbelief**.

[.24-25a]

*<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?"*

Jesus asked where the baptism of John the Baptist came from. His use of the term "baptism" refers to the whole of John's ministry, and the authority for his ministry, marked by baptizing people. Jesus is not simply taking up for John, but inextricably joining their ministries in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. For the religious leaders to acknowledge one meant they had to recognize both, and to reject one meant the same.

John the Baptist was another figure that the religious leaders had much conflict with and held in great disdain. John rebuked them regularly, and the crowds loved him. The verdict of how the religious leaders felt about him was well known. They rejected him and did not consider his ministry as valid. But they were well aware of how much the crowds loved him. If they would not accept John the Baptist, then they could not accept Jesus as from God, because of the role of John's ministry in introducing Jesus as God's Messiah. Jesus' question to the religious leaders was intended to expose their rejection of John, and, subsequently, their rejection of Him.

[.25b-27]

*And they discussed it among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?' <sup>26</sup>But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet." <sup>27</sup>So they answered Jesus, "We do not know." And he said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."*

**In typical manner, they had to confer with one another.** But their answer never satisfied; not Jesus, not them, nor the crowds. At every encounter with Jesus, the religious were left scratching their head, and often publicly embarrassed. This alone should've been a sign to them, but they couldn't see that as evidence any more than they would see the evidence of Jesus' divinity that He revealed to them. **[Problem #1] Unbelief can never be satisfied because it rejects what has been revealed as obvious, real, and true.**

**They weighed the possible outcomes of their answers.** Admitting that John's ministry was from heaven did not mean that they would confess that he was God, but that his ministry served God's purpose. And it would mean that they had to admit they wrongly rejected him. But it also means they would have to acknowledge Jesus was from God as well. This simply was not an option for them because, first and foremost, they would not believe this. At this point, admitting that John was from heaven meant to confess their unbelief in God, the very reality driving their opposition of Jesus.

With the first option off the table, they weighed the second, "was John the Baptist 'from man'?" **What would it mean for them to admit that John was "from man"?** Not admitting that John was from God, now to say the opposite was just as bad. They were unwilling to say this because all the people knew that John was a prophet sent from God. They WOULDN'T say that John was from Heaven because of what it would require them to confess about their rejection of Jesus. But they COULDN'T say he was from man, because of the crowds who believed he was a prophet from God. **[Problem #2] Unbelief doesn't just put you between a rock and a hard place; it traps one between the hardness of heart and the threat of fear.**

After weighing the logical outcomes of their possible answers, they responded to Jesus that they did not know. We know that even this is a lie. The truth is, as we hear from their debate, they know that they can't say one way or the other or they will be caught in the tension of their unbelief. If they wanted to be honest, they would NOT have said "we can't say", but



rather “we won’t say”. Answering Jesus’ question about John the Baptist would require the religious leaders to confess their unbelief about who Jesus really was. And this is what truth requires, faith by confession unto repentance. **[Problem #3] Unbelief deceived them to believe they could say “we don’t know” as it caused them to deny truth, elevate a lesser glory, in the fear of people, and lie to hide what they would not confess.** This is exactly what Paul describes in Romans 1. READ Romans 1:21-23 **When u WON’T honor God as God, u become foolish n think’g & darknd in heart, 2 b deceived by false claims & exchangd glory.**

And to their unbelief Jesus responded, *“Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”* **Jesus won’t answer their question.** He doesn’t answer it for the same reason they asked it, their unbelief. The religious leaders couldn’t say, and Jesus wouldn’t say. **Why wouldn’t Jesus just answer their question and move on?** He had responded to them many times with His superior wisdom and truth. **Why was this moment any different? What could possibly make Jesus stay silent when he had an opportunity to show them the error of their way and thinking?** Jesus doesn’t need to answer their question. The witnesses that their unbelief had rejected had already answered their question. They rejected John the Baptist. They rejected God. They rejected the testimony of the crowd. And now, they rejected even the testimony of their own conscience to fortify themselves in the hardness of their unbelief. You see, when one claims, “God is silent”, they make a statement of unbelief that has required them to reject His revelation. God is not silent. Unbelief has blocked His revelation, plugged their ears and blinded their eyes to His witnesses. **\*Jesus is silent NOT because He cannot or will not speak, but because He has already spoken, and they had not believed.**

**The question they posed was one of authority, but the real issue Jesus identifies was unbelief.** “These were men who had been asked a question to which they knew the answer, but refused to give it because they feared the consequences.”<sup>1</sup> The key to this encounter is understanding this passage in light of our own struggles with unbelief today. **God is silent when our heart is not one of genuine seeking but of rebellious unbelief, where we have denied faith in His worthiness and failed to believe what He has already revealed.**

**Unbelief condemns us when truth confronts our sin.** When we feel sin’s shame or condemnation, we often respond **“but who says ‘this is wrong’ or ‘only that is right’?”** When we entertain these thoughts, we pose the same question of authority that the religious leaders asked. The main way we reject Jesus’ authority is by questioning His Word, the first act of unbelief in the Bible. (Genesis 3) **Every encounter with truth confronts and exposes unbelief, regardless of where it finds it or what question it addresses. Every response that questions Jesus’ authority is raised because you have rejected His worthiness.**

**Jesus’ question is not just for the religious leaders.** It is for the person who has never become a Christian and lives in unbelief. It is also for the religious, people who claim to know Gd but deny His power.

**Unbelief cannot be satisfied, but we create false gospels to try and appease it.** Some demand religious earning through performance, “you do & God will.”, but this never works. Some demand empirical evidence. This is often seen when one pits science against Christianity by expecting from the Bible what is not intended in some secondary, nuanced argument, even accepting what is not empirically proven(theory) as greater evidence, and thereby trying to discredit the Bible. Some demand intellectual achievement, demanding the Bible prove more answers to hard questions than it provides, even failing to acknowledge that it gives more logic in answers than the world offers. The problem of evil and suffering is one such example. The world offers no logical response, but ignores the gospel that speaks of a higher glory in suffering. The “blessing” gospel takes wealth and fortune, or some other trinket, as always an undeniable proof of God’s favor. Then it commends that all should aspire to the same, but most never have quite enough faith to receive. The pleasure gospel ‘redefines a sexual ethic’ that approves of sexual immorality in any of it myriad of forms, even arguing that this is what God intended. The “higher emotional intelligence” effort uses therapeutic vocabulary to twist to make sin a sickness and the ill a victim, thereby removing personal responsibility for sin, reducing it simply to brokenness, and sets individual at the center for God to appease. Finally, the “experience gospel” makes Christianity nothing more than a “dopamine” hit to salve sin’s

<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris, [The Gospel according to Matthew](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 535.



guilt by seeking a spiritual rush from singing right songs using a few Bible verses like 'incantation chanting'. And these are all within the scope of "Christianity". Many, if not most, forms of unbelief are a functional substitution for the gospel more than a denial of it, but they all require the same response as unbelief. **Unbelief must be repented of, to confess that Jesus is worthy and trust in Him.**

What questions have you asked Jesus lately? Is there any area of your life where you feel God is silent? Any question or decision in which you feel like God is not responding? Is there any sense of unbelief masked in your inquiry? Ask yourself this, is there any situation or area of your life where you know you have not obeyed God's command, where you are living in known sin against His Word, or where you have simply ignored Holy Spirit and His counsel and guidance in your heart? If any of these are true, then God is not silent because He is angry but because you are not truly seeking Him. **God is never silent to punish us. His silence is only one of patience with us.**

**God promises that when we seek Him with all our heart, we will find Him.** The question of unbelief may keep God silent, but the prayer of faith is one God answers. Faith moves God to answer and to act. Unbelief silences Him. When we remain in unbelief, the stubbornness of self-will hardens our heart toward God, but offers no relief. When we confess our sin, the One in whom we place our faith, who is worthy of all our praise and glory, forgives us and cleanses us from that sin, to release us from its condemnation, shame, and guilt. Unbelief only and always leads to a damnable end, hardness that is crushed and driven away like chaff if the wind to perish. Faith produces repentance that confesses Jesus' worthiness, submits to His Word, and walks in obedience to Him. **There is only one answer to the problem of unbelief: faith that produces repentance and confession.**

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