

QUESTION: Why did Jesus respond with “you say” when asked questions, instead of giving a direct answer? (Matthew 27:11)

ANSWER: Throughout the Gospels, we see that when Jesus was questioned by both religious leaders and political authorities, His responses were often not direct. Instead, He frequently used the phrase “you say.” This response can seem puzzling at first, but it is full of theological significance. Let’s explore this further with key passages:

Matthew 27:11

[11] *“Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked Him, saying, ‘Are You the King of the Jews?’ Jesus said to him, ‘You say so.’”*

In this moment, Jesus does not deny the accusation but responds in a way that leaves the judgment up to the one asking. He doesn’t directly affirm or deny the title of “King of the Jews.” Instead, He challenges the questioner to consider the weight of his own words.

Luke 22:68-71

[68] *“If I tell you, you will by no means believe. [69] And if I also ask you, you will by no means answer Me or let Me go. [70] Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God.”*

[71] *“Then they all said, ‘Are You then the Son of God?’ So He said to them, ‘You rightly say that I am.’”*

In this interaction, Jesus uses a similar approach, acknowledging the truth of their words while pointing to a deeper, more profound truth: His divine authority as the Son of God. In this context, “You say” is not a denial but an invitation for them to confront the truth of who He is.

Luke 23:3

“Then Pilate asked Him, saying, ‘Are You the King of the Jews?’ Jesus answered him and said, ‘It is as you say.’”

Here again, Jesus confirms the title but not in the way Pilate expects. He is not simply the “King of the Jews” in a political sense, but in a cosmic, eternal sense. His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36).

Theological Significance of “You Say”

Jesus often used the phrase “you say” to provoke reflection and self-examination. Theologically, this serves several purposes:

1. **Affirmation of Truth, Yet with Reservation:** Jesus doesn't outright deny the statements made by others; He affirms their words, but in a way that makes them question their own understanding. This is important because Jesus was not interested in merely engaging in a rhetorical back-and-forth. His aim was to provoke spiritual awareness and understanding of divine truth. For example, when Jesus says, “You say so,” He doesn't directly declare Himself as King or as the Son of God in the way the religious leaders expect. Instead, He invites them to acknowledge the truth of His identity on their own terms.
2. **Non-Defensive Posture:** In Matthew 27:11, when asked by Pilate whether He is the King of the Jews, Jesus' response is non-defensive. He doesn't feel the need to justify Himself. Jesus knew His identity was not defined by human opinions or political titles. He teaches us, through His silence and His responses, that our identity should be rooted in God's truth, not in the labels or accusations placed on us by the world (John 8:32).

3. **Divine Wisdom in Handling Opposition:** Jesus knew that the people questioning Him were not seeking truth, but rather trying to trap Him or use His words against Him (Matthew 22:15-22). For instance, in Matthew 22, when the Pharisees asked Jesus whether it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, Jesus’ response—“Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21)—was a masterful way of answering without falling into their trap. Similarly, by saying “you say,” He avoids being manipulated or ensnared by their false accusations.

4. **Calling to Deeper Reflection on His Divinity:** Jesus’ responses in these situations often point toward the deeper, hidden truth of His nature. In Luke 22:70, when asked if He is the Son of God, He replies, “You say that I am.” He doesn’t explicitly proclaim Himself in that moment, yet He doesn’t deny it either. He leaves the matter open for those who are willing to discern the truth for themselves, just as He did throughout His ministry when He would speak in parables to hide the truth from those unwilling to listen (Matthew 13:10-17).

5. Invitation for Personal Conviction: Ultimately, Jesus uses this phrase to invite individuals to arrive at their own conclusion about His identity. In Matthew 16:13-16, when Jesus asks His disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” He makes them confront their personal understanding of Him. This interaction is a call for all to come to terms with who He truly is: the Christ, the Son of the living God. By using “you say,” He gives them (and us) the space to arrive at that understanding personally, without imposing a forced answer.

The Role of Wisdom in Our Responses

Jesus’ approach to responding to accusations and questions teaches us valuable lessons about wisdom in speech. In our own lives, especially when confronted by opposition or false accusations, we must carefully consider how we respond. Like Jesus, we may sometimes need to leave judgment to others, not feeling the need to correct every misinterpretation or defend ourselves at every turn. Instead, we can trust in God’s timing and in His ultimate authority.

For instance, imagine you are a pastor and someone brings a false accusation against you. The accuser might say, “You’re one

of those pastors who only care about money and manipulate your congregation.” The temptation might be to immediately defend yourself, but consider Jesus’ approach. By responding wisely, acknowledging part of the accusation, and leaving the rest to God, you demonstrate trust in divine justice.

“You say”—meaning *“Yes, you have said it that way.”*

This keeps the discussion focused on the accuser’s perspective, rather than engaging in an endless back-and-forth. Like Jesus, we too must sometimes respond in a way that challenges others to examine their own hearts and motives (Matthew 7:3-5).

Conclusion

Jesus’ use of the phrase “you say” reflects His deep understanding of the human heart and His mission to reveal the truth, not just in words, but in the way He responded to questions. By using this phrase, He allowed individuals to wrestle with the truth on their own terms, giving them the opportunity to recognize His divine identity for themselves. This is a reminder to us to be wise in our words, to respond with grace, and to trust that God will guide us in moments of opposition.

May we learn from Jesus’ example, using wisdom in our responses

and leaving judgment to God.

May the Lord bless you.

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