

John 10:24

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.

Analysis

Then came the Jews round about him—The verb "came round about" (ἐκύκλωσαν/ekyklosan) means to encircle or surround, suggesting an aggressive posture. This isn't a friendly inquiry but a confrontation. The crowd forms a ring, perhaps to prevent escape or to create a public spectacle. The atmosphere is hostile, not curious.

How long dost thou make us to doubt?—The Greek phrase τὴν ψυχὴν ἡμῶν αἴρεις (tēn psychēn hēmōn aireis) literally means "How long will you take away our soul/life?" or "hold our soul in suspense?" The idiomatic meaning is "How long will you keep us in doubt?" But the literal wording is ironic—they accuse Jesus of disturbing their peace when He offers to give them life (John 10:10).

If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly—They demand unambiguous declaration: "Are you the Messiah, yes or no?" The phrase "tell us plainly" (εἰπὲ ἡμῖν παρρησίᾳ/ eipe hēmin parrēsia) uses παρρησία (parrēsia), meaning boldly, openly, without figure or metaphor. They want a direct claim they can use legally against Him.

The question appears sincere but is actually a trap. If Jesus openly declares "I am the Messiah," they'll charge Him with blasphemy and sedition (claiming to be king challenges Roman authority). If He denies it, they can dismiss Him. They're not seeking truth but seeking grounds for accusation. The question is rhetorical strategy, not honest inquiry.

Historical Context

Messianic expectations ran high during Hanukkah, a festival celebrating liberation from foreign oppression. The crowd might have hoped Jesus would declare Himself Messiah and lead rebellion against Rome, as the Maccabees had against the Seleucids. Others sought legal grounds to arrest Him. The question "Are you the Christ?" carried political and religious explosiveness.

Jewish law required two or three witnesses for capital charges. By demanding a public confession, they sought usable testimony. Jesus had performed undeniable miracles and made provocative claims, but nothing they could easily prosecute. A clear messianic claim would provide the evidence they needed.

Jesus's response (verses 25-30) doesn't directly say "I am the Christ" but makes claims far greater—unity with the Father, divine authority, power over life and death. He answers the question through His works and relationship to the Father, not through a simple formula they could manipulate. His wisdom avoids their trap while declaring the truth more profoundly than they requested.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. Why does Jesus often answer questions indirectly rather than with simple yes/no responses?
2. How can we discern between honest seekers asking difficult questions and those setting rhetorical traps?
3. What does this confrontation teach about presenting the gospel in hostile environments?

Interlinear Text

ἐκύκλωσαν οὖν αὐτῷ οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ ἔλεγον αὐτῷ
came Then him G3588 the Jews and said him
G2944 G3767 G846 G2453 G2532 G3004 G846

Ἐως πότε τὴν ψυχὴν ἡμῶν αἴρεις εἰ σὺ εἰ
How long G4219 G3588 to doubt us dost thou make If thou be
G2193 G5590 G2257 G142 G1487 G4771 G1488

ο Χριστός εἰπε ἡμῖν παρόρθησίᾳ
the Christ tell us plainly
G3588 G2036 G2254 G3954

Additional Cross-References

John 1:19 (Parallel theme): And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou?

Matthew 11:3 (Parallel theme): And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?

John 8:25 (Parallel theme): Then said they unto him, Who art thou? And Jesus saith unto them, Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning.

John 8:53 (Parallel theme): Art thou greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? and the prophets are dead: whom makest thou thyself?