

Here is the second half of my pop quiz (see yesterday's post); some of the questions are just ... factual questions. Some of them give me a chance actually to teach something. ....

7. According to the Gospels, who baptized Jesus? Who carried his cross? Who buried him?  
Answers: John the Baptist, Simon of Cyrene and/or Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea. So this question allows for a teachable moment. Mark's Gospel indicates that Simon of Cyrene carried the cross for Jesus. It does NOT say that Jesus started to carry it, stumbled, and so they had Simon carry it. That's how it's portrayed in a lot of the movies. But the reason is because of the Gospel of John. In John we're told that \*Jesus\* carried his cross. How can both be right? Well, if he stumbles and then Simon (unwillingly) comes on board, the problem is solved. Part of my course is designed to show how directors have to make decisions when the Gospels are at odds, and this is a place where that has to be done.

The bigger problem is that John indicates that Jesus carried the cross himself the whole way. So then how could Simon of Cyrene have done it? In the movie *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (which some viewers have argued is false advertising) Simon of Cyrene is played by none other than Sidney Poitier. Jesus (Max von Sydow - long before his *Exorcist* fame) starts off carrying the cross; Simon of C. is compelled to help him carry it; but he \*helps\* him carry it - Jesus still carries it himself as well. So \*both\* Gospels are right: Mark is right that Simon was compelled to carry the cross and John is right that Jesus carried it!

On the burial question, some readers of the blog rightly pointed out that in John's Gospel Nicodemus also helps bury Jesus and that in the book of Acts it's actually a group of Jews from the Sanhedrin who bury him; but the latter is not one of the Gospels (cf. the question!), and Joseph of A. works for John as well as the Synoptics.

8. In about what year did Jesus die? What year was he born?  
I use this question to deal with basic chronology, to situate students in time (since some of them have NO sense of history); I also use it to explain why there was no year zero, again, and to explain that we don't know how old Jesus was when he started his ministry or when he died. Luke says (and Luke \*alone\* says - I assume he was guessing) that Jesus was "about 30" when he started his ministry. In Mark he may have been 21 or 40; same with the others.. Only in John is there any indication that the ministry took more than a few months (which is the clear impression you'd have from Mark); in John there are three separate Passover feasts mentioned, so the ministry there lasts at least over two years. Most people round it up to three, add that to Luke's dating of the beginning of his ministry, and PRESTO, Jesus then is widely assumed to have died when he was 33. But who knows? (In my view, no one knows.)
9. The author of the Gospel of Luke wrote two books. Name two of them.  
Luke (most of my students get that one. J ). And Acts. This question is just for some factual information.
10. What is normally thought to have been the occupations of (a) Matthew and (b) Luke?

Tax Collector and Physician. If I have time in class, I explain that in fact we don't know who wrote these books, and I point out that if you read the only passage in Matthew that mentions someone named Matthew, you would have no idea that the author is referring to himself (as the students can see simply by reading Matt. 9 for themselves. And if I have more time - which I usually don't - I explain the complex logic by which one gets to the idea that Luke and Acts were written by Luke, the Gentile physician, the one-time traveling companion of Paul. If anyone on the blog wants to know the logic, I'll be happy to spell it out in a subsequent post.

11. Which of the following were Jews? John the Baptist, Alexander the Great, Jesus, Pontius Pilate, Simon Peter, Tacitus, the Apostle Paul.

JB, Jesus, Peter, Paul. I use this to give a relatively long talk on how Jesus was a JEW and not, decidedly not, a Christian. Some of my students start getting nervous about the semester at just this point....

12. What is the shortest verse in the New Testament?

OK, a number of you on the second try got it right (thank the gods for Google....). So here's the deal. Virtually every English speaking human on the planet who has any idea of the answer thinks that it is "Jesus wept," John 11:35. That's wrong. I scarcely need point out that the NT was not written in English, and different translations translate different passages differently, so you can't decide a shortest verse on the basis of an English translation. I would accept TWO different answers for this question (I tell my students that this is a great trivia question for their next frat party; at this point they start understanding my sense of humor). If you count by WORDS, 1 Thess. 5:16 is the shortest verse in the Bible: two words, in Greek, "rejoice always" ("Jesus wept" is actually three words in Greek). If you count by LETTERS, Luke 20:30 is the shortest. It has 12 letters in Greek (though three words), 1 Thess 5:16 has 14 letters, and John 11:35 has 16 letters.

See how much fun you can have at a frat party?



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