

# “THE BIG QUESTIONS — AN INTRODUCTION”

5.5.19

## INTRODUCTION

Could you imagine being asked 390 questions — a day? That’s the average number of curiosities four-year-old girls aim, primarily at their moms.

The toughest questions mothers get asked (2013 British survey):

- Why is water wet?
- Where does the sky end?
- What are shadows made of?
- Why is the sky blue?
- How do fish breathe underwater?

Sometimes there are the bizarre questions as well, such as this one presented by a mother of two boys: “What happens if a dog and a cat are sick on a zebra?” That ranks right up there with one of my personal favorites from childhood: “What happens if you throw a white hat into the Red Sea?” (Answer: “It gets wet.”)

Questions. From day 1 of our lives, it seems, we all have and hear questions — sometimes coming from the innocence of childhood, sometimes from the student to the teacher, sometimes from the teacher to the student, sometimes from the worker to the boss, sometimes from spouse to spouse, sometimes from parent to child. When I came out here to candidate last August, there were lots of questions — from the MLT the night before I spoke, and a Q&A with the congregation following my message. Every day, it seems, presents some kind of questions.

But for Christians, sometimes it’s not the questions so much as it is trying to find an answer. And for Christians, sometimes the questions we get are from “seekers” — people still wrestling with the claims and promises of Christianity. We want to bring answers to those questions, especially if we feel that answering those questions will bring somebody closer to a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Once upon a time, God’s Son Jesus Christ actually lived among us. And as he grew up and began his ministry, he received questions — lots of them. How many questions was Jesus asked? An educated guess from the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John as well as the book of Acts is 183. Some of them are pretty well known:

***“Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” — Matthew 9:11***

***“[W]hat will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” — Matthew 24:3b.***

***“What must I do to inherit eternal life?” — Luke 10:25.***

***“Are you then the Son of God?” — Luke 22:70.***

Very important questions — all of those. Doesn’t it kinda make you wonder what questions you would have wanted to ask Jesus? How cool would that be! But for our purposes, for this summer series, what are our “big” questions? What exactly are we going to be talking about? Well, the “big” questions for this series are those questions that basically fall into two categories:

- 1) The questions that have been thrown at you when you were sharing with somebody; or
- 2) The questions that still stump or trouble you, even after being saved. Those could be stories you read in the papers, stories you hear on TV, or something that maybe just came out of your own devotions or Bible studies.

So why a series on “the big questions” we sometimes face and making the journey together to find the answer? First, because people are seeking, and that’s one thing we’re here for — to come alongside the seekers who come our way. As Peter said: *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have — I Peter 3:15b.*

Unfortunately, the church is failing to a large extent to do that — to be a place where seekers can find answers. A guy named Dr. Jeremiah Johnston recently wrote a book called, “Unanswered.” In it he introduces us to the term “deconversions.” What he says is that the church today is seeing an upsurge in deconversions; people come into the church expecting it to be a place where they can find answers to their questions about God, Jesus, the Bible, faith and so on. What he found is happening is that people are not finding those answers and therefore are leaving. But their questions remain. Whether or not they stay in church, their questions continue to live. That is reason enough to have a series on the “big” questions. Second, we don’t know what answer may be the seed that God uses to begin the process that ultimately plants salvation in somebody’s heart. But third, after all those things, for me, it’s become oddly personal.

### **SOME IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS**

As we dive into this kind of series, there are a few things that need to be kept in mind when we are thinking about people’s questions (including our own):

First, questions about God himself may in the final analysis be impossible to completely, fully answer. *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts” — Isaiah 55:8-9.* The fact is, there are some things about God — who he is, how he works, how he thinks and reasons — that are and will always be far, far beyond us. Sometimes the questions that trouble us or the seekers and skeptics around us can only be partially answered, by means of pulling what we do know about God — for instance, his goodness, his mercy, his perfect justice and judgment — and have the faith that comes from knowing that, no matter the question or concern, he knows. He always absolutely knows. We are limited; he is limitless. Sometimes simply knowing that will be the best we can do. It’s been suggested that one of the things that will continue in the eternity of heaven will be learning more and more about God. Even with eternity as the timeframe, we will never know what God knows. But he will become more fully known.

Second, the questions may just be somebody’s honest desire to learn more about Christianity, the Bible and Jesus Christ. There are no “dumb” or “silly” questions. For instance, I’ve asked Paul and Ryan questions about some of their specific work on their farms. I’ll hear them use a word or phrase and I don’t have a clue what they’re talking about, so I ask. One of the things that’s been great about them is they’ve never made me feel like an idiot; they’ve always been very gracious in answering this non-farmboy’s questions. That’s a great example: We need to greet all questions with love and understanding because not everybody has had the same biblical upbringing or education or opportunities that maybe somebody else has had. Just like with Paul and Ryan, what may be silly to us may be incredibly important and absolutely unknown to them.

Third, the questions may be the outward sign of somebody’s wrestling with the claims of Christianity, and trying to fight off their impact. As a result, these questions may come with a façade of sarcasm or anger. That is why Peter advised his audience that, as they give the reasons for the hope they have in Jesus Christ, that they should *do this with gentleness and respect — I*

**Peter 3:15b.** Remember: We are making a statement for Christ not only in our answers but in how we answer.

Fourth, the questions need to be taken seriously because, at the end of the day, they may be cases of spiritual life and death — questions of eternal importance. [LEE STROBEL EXAMPLE — the truth behind the resurrection of Jesus Christ]. And one way to show that you are taking a question seriously is to tell the person, “That is a great question and, to be honest, I’m not sure what the answer is. Let’s see if we can find the answer together.” The questions we receive need to be received with honesty, including, “I don’t know.” But let that be an opportunity to search out the answer together. That is a great way of telling somebody that we are taking their question seriously.

And as we receive these questions, our first response before even beginning to think about answering should be a prayer based on James 1:5: ***“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you — James 1:5.*** Now the wisdom that James was talking about was not simply intellectual knowing or not knowing. This wisdom is both knowing and then applying that knowledge in a practical way — so not just an answer to a question, but what that answer might look like in the real world. But whatever the question, James is telling us that the wisdom in our answers will only be as strong as the desperation in our prayers. Learn to embrace that desperate helplessness — of being only able to answer as God provides us the wisdom. And what is really cool is that, according to James, God has promised to give us the wisdom we need. He will not turn us down or send us away empty. He “gives generously to all.”

And we also can’t forget that a great source of the wisdom we need for the questions we’ll be asked all centers on the wisdom God has already given us: His Word. As Paul wrote to Timothy in his second letter: ***[T]he Holy Scriptures . . . are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work — Paul, II Timothy 3:15b-17.***

And one final thing: We are not alone. We are not dependent on our own cleverness to figure out how to respond to anybody’s questions. Jesus said it this way: ***“[D]o not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 10:19-20.*** In other words, we can trust that, when we need them, the thoughts and words will be there.

And the fact is, one thing we may never know when talking with somebody and hearing their questions is where they are in their journey to Jesus Christ. Just pretend: If coming to Christ is a process of 1,000 steps, that person may be at step 996 — or they may be at step 6. All we need to be is faithful to the moment. Ask God for the wisdom of what to say and how to say it, and that wisdom will be given to you. James 1:5 promises that.

### **CONCLUSION — THE “GOOD NEWS”**

***Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed***

*them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him — Matthew 4:23-25.*

For the people who never had any realistic hope of ever being healed, of ever feeling better, all of a sudden there was this guy from Nazareth who actually could heal every disease that was brought to him. Talk about mass communication: the masses communicated to everyone they could about what they were seeing this Jesus guy do. Can you imagine being alive then, having a friend, neighbor or loved one who was sick, who was injured — whatever the situation was — and then here was the possibility, I mean the actual, absolute certainty that, if this guy saw you, he would heal you, no doubt about it for real. You would have run through walls to make sure those that you cared about had that news, that if they could get themselves to him, they would be healed. And you would do anything and everything you needed to do to get them to him; I mean, you'd carry them by piggyback if you had to — whatever it took to bring the one who needed healing to the one who could heal.

Now think about sin as a disease. Jesus of Nazareth is still in the business of healing, and his cure is guaranteed to work. You know anybody who's sick with this disease? Anybody you care about? Wouldn't you still run through walls to get them this news? Wouldn't you do anything you could to get them to him, even carrying them piggyback if you had to — whatever it took to bring the one who needed healing to the one who could heal. This healing, the healing from sin, is even more important — more important than any cure in the history of mankind.

So, starting next week, we start looking at questions and seeking those answers. The first one? Actually, a question I've heard many of you ask me since I've been here: "How can I be sure that I'm saved when I still sin?" Hope to see you all here — and pray that God would lead you to somebody to bring. This is going to be fun. Let's pray!