

Questions for An Easter Morning

Over the years as I've studied the events of Passion Week and the resurrection, I've found it interesting to consider some of the questions that were asked by various ones between Thursday night and Easter Sunday morning.

I want us to begin with one often asked over the years. It was a question asked of Jesus in all four of the gospel accounts of his trial. It's the question on the lips of the crowd on Palm Sunday when Jesus rode into Jerusalem. Pilate essentially asks this question. Jesus even asked a form of this question to his disciples. The question is: **"Who is this Jesus?"**

It was the question everyone was asking. Matthew tells us as Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, **"The whole city was stirred and asked 'Who is this?'" Matthew 21:10.**

Jesus asked of his disciples, **"Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Matthew 16:13-15**

It was the question the high priest asked of him at his trial. **"The high priest said to him, 'I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.'" Matthew 26:63** Who are you?

Pilate asked of him, **"Are you the king of the Jews?" Matthew 27:11.** "Who are you, Jesus?" In John's Gospel, Pilate even asks Jesus, "Where do you come from?" (John 19:9), almost as if he was saying, "Are you from this planet?" Who are you? Are you the Christ? The Messiah? Are you a prophet, a teacher, the savior of the world? Are you really who you say you are or are you a lunatic? A deceiver or deceived?" Who is this Jesus?

This is one of the essential questions and it must be settled in our minds and hearts. Is Jesus really who he says he is? If he is who he says he is, then it answers the next question, "Can he do what he says he can do?" If he really is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, then he really can save me, change me, cleanse me of my sin, deliver me from addiction, take away my shame and guilt and pain and give me peace and hope and eternal life. It is important that we answer this question, "Who is this Jesus?"

In Matthew 21, as the city asked "Who is this?" The crowds answered, **"This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."** For those folks he was a prophet and perhaps the Messiah they had been waiting for.

In response to Jesus' question to the disciples about who they thought he was, it was

Peter who declared, **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Matthew 16:16** And Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.”

In Matthew 26, to the high priest who demanded an answer as to whether Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, after first refusing to answer his questions, Jesus finally said, **“Yes, it is as you say. In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” Matthew 26:64** The response of the chief priest was to tear his garments for what he heard was considered blasphemy – Jesus declaring himself to be Messiah. It got worse for the chief priest. Luke tells us they asked, **“Are you then the Son of God?” Jesus replied, “You are right in saying I am.” Luke 22:70**

In Matthew 27, to the Roman Governor Pilate’s question, “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus replied, **“Yes it is as you say.”** He told Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world.” When Pilate said, “You are a king then!” Jesus said, **“You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born and for this I came into the world...” John 18:37**

Who is Jesus? It’s the question of the ages. Ultimately you have to decide what you believe about Jesus. Is he a mythological figure? A revolutionary prophet? Or is he the Son of God, the Savior come to redeem us from our sin? The testimony of Jesus, the testimony of Scripture, the testimony of the resurrection, the testimony of the saints of God for 2,000 years, the testimony of our own life changing experience has been and still is, “Yes, it is as you say.” Jesus is who he says he is. He is the risen Son of the Living God and He can do what he says he can do!

There is another question that goes hand in hand with “Who is Jesus?” and that is, **“Why must he die?”** Pilate repeatedly asks that question in Luke 23. As the chief priests and rulers are demanding his death by crucifixion, the bible says **“For the third time Pilate spoke to them: ‘Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty.’” Luke 23:22**

The question is asked by Jesus himself, when in agony from the cross he cries out, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Matthew 27:46.** Why must he be forsaken? If he is God’s son, why must he die? The answer to that question can be life changing for you.

Jesus said, **“The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Matthew 20:28** What crime had he committed? None. Then why

must he die? He was giving his life as a ransom for us. He died for us. The prophet Isaiah explains. **“Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted.”** Isaiah is saying, “We thought Jesus was struck down by God because he was a blasphemer, claiming to be God.” But Isaiah declares, “Now we know why he had to be forsaken, why he had to die.” **“But he was wounded for our transgression, he was bruised and crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds we are healed...we all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”** Isaiah 53:5-6

Why did he die? He died for us. He died as our substitute. He bore the iniquity of us all, all of our sins he bore on the cross, forsaken so we could be forgiven, forsaken so we could be accepted and welcomed into God’s family as sons and daughters. He committed no crime. We did. Yet God in his mercy laid upon Jesus the iniquity of us all. Jesus died in our place so we could live.

Paul writes, **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** 2 Corinthians 5:21. Why did he have to die? He became the sacrifice, the substitute for you and for me.

There is another question I want us to consider, asked on Easter Sunday morning. After his crucifixion, because it was late in the afternoon and the Jewish Sabbath was approaching, Jesus’s body was quickly wrapped and placed in the tomb and the tomb was sealed. The bible tells us after the Sabbath, early on Sunday morning, some women went to the tomb with spices in order to more thoroughly anoint Jesus’ body as part of the burial. When they arrived, they found the stone had been rolled away and the body of the Lord was gone. The Bible says, **“While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!’”** Luke 24:4-6

Why do you look for the living among the dead? What a great question. But think about it for a moment. The ladies – Mary the mother of Jesus, Joanna, Mary Magdalene among others – had watched Jesus die on the cross. They saw Joseph of Arimathea, along with Nicodemus, take the body of Jesus, wrap his lifeless body in linen strips with a mixture of myrrh and aloes

and place him in the tomb. They knew he was dead, so where else would they look but in the cemetery? But the angels declared, “You don’t look for the living among the dead. He is not here. He is not dead. He is risen! He’s alive!”

The reality of the resurrection changes everything for us. It changes every trip to the cemetery for us. We honor a life and a memory at the cemetery, but that person that was so precious and important to us, they aren’t there.

The angel could ask the same question of us. “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” Because Jesus lives, you will live also. Because Jesus lives, I can remember and reflect in that cemetery, but I’m not looking to find my loved ones there. They are alive and well in the presence of the Lord. To be absent from this body is to be present with the Lord. Remember what Jesus told that dying thief beside him? “This day you will be with me in paradise!” Not someday. Today! This day!

Dear ones, we serve a risen Savior. Let the reality of Christ’s resurrection fill your heart and your life with hope and peace today. You don’t have to fear death. Jesus conquered death, hell and the grave. Stop looking for the living among the dead. Stop sifting through the ashes of the past to find your life and destiny. Stop preparing for a funeral and start preparing for a celebration in heaven. It’s not a funeral dinner I’m getting ready for, it’s the marriage supper of the Lamb!

You don’t have to keep your head bowed down with grief and sorrow for now is Christ risen from the dead. He is the resurrection and the life. I quote it every year, from St. John Chrysostom’s Easter Homily, **“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is your victory? Christ is risen and hell is overthrown. Christ is risen and the demons are fallen. Christ is risen and the angels rejoice. Christ is risen and life reigns. Christ is risen and not one dead remains in the grave. To Him be glory and majesty unto the ages of ages. Amen.”** ...St. **John Chrysostom**

One more question. This is one Jesus himself asked. John’s gospel tells us after Mary Magdalene and the others found the tomb empty and were greeted by the angels, they ran to tell the disciples. Peter and John ran back to see for themselves and Mary Magdalene returned with them. After they left, Mary stood outside the empty tomb, alone, weeping.

As Jesus appeared next to Mary he asked her this question, **“Woman, why are you crying?”** Max Lucado wrote concerning this verse, “An uncommon question to be asked in a

cemetery. In fact, the question is rude. That is, unless the questioner knows something the questionee doesn't."

"Why are you crying?" Isn't it obvious? Someone has died. Someone has been taken from her and she is broken hearted. In this instance, it is not only that he has died, but now the body has been taken and she doesn't know where he is or what to do.

Thinking he was the gardener, Mary said, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him." Then Jesus said to her, "Mary." She immediately knew who he was and cried out, "Teacher." No one had ever spoken her name like Jesus. "Don't weep Mary and don't hold on to me. Go tell my brothers you've seen me." "I have seen the Lord" Mary announced. Jesus is risen, and it's cause for tears to be wiped away. The finality of death's grip has been broken. He is risen, just as he said!

Why are you crying? It is a strange question for a cemetery, unless, as Lucado said, the questioner knows something the person being questioned doesn't.

Jesus is risen and he knows something, and now we know something, that makes all the difference in the world. Because he lives, we shall live forever. Because he lives, our perishable body is one day going to be changed - clothed with an imperishable body.

Because he rose up from that grave on that glorious Easter morning, then I can ask you the same question Jesus asked of Mary that morning. Why are you crying? Jesus is with you now. All things are possible. Why are you crying? He has triumphed over sin, sickness, death and hell. Why are you crying? He can mend every broken heart and every broken life.

The old spiritual said, "Mary don't you weep, Martha don't you moan." Jesus is risen from the grave. It's time to dry your weeping eyes. Wipe away your tears. Things are not as they seem. There is a victory won in his death and resurrection.

Walter Wangerin wrote these words as though they were the final thoughts of Jesus as he surrendered his spirit on the cross: **"Satan thou art defeated in my defeat. Sin, dispossessed of a people! Death, look about thee; thou art not mighty and dreadful. Lo, I close my eyes and die – and death shall be no more."** ...Walter Wangerin

It is at the final glimpse of all things, in the book of Revelation that we see him and hear Jesus declare, **"I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades."** Revelation 1:18

Wangerin wrote, **"O Christ! When you died, you broke the wall that divided us from**

God: you struck it, you cracked it, you tore it apart – you made a door of that which had been death before.” ...Walter Wangerin He lives! Hallelujah. He lives!

Who is this Jesus? It is as you say. He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, the Savior of the world. Why did he have to die? It was for me. It was for you. He gave his life as a ransom, a sacrifice to give life to us.

Why do you seek the living among the dead? He isn't there. He is risen. Why are you weeping? He made a door out of death! He lives and because he lives, there is hope for you and your circumstances.

One last question this morning. It is a question Pilate asked and one I feel compelled to ask as well. To the crowds Pilate asked, **“What shall I do then, with Jesus who is called Christ?” Matthew 27:22**

What will you do with Jesus, the risen Savior and Lord? You can accept him or reject him. You can try to ignore him, dismiss him or run from him, but the question is there and it calls for an answer. He invites you to come to him today. No one else can answer for you. What will you do with Jesus today?

I hope you will open your heart to him and receive him as Savior and Lord of your life. Admit you have sinned against God's word, his commands. Repent of your sins and ask Jesus to save you. The Bible says **“That if you confess with your mouth “Jesus is Lord” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” ...Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” Romans 10:9-13**

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Let's pray.