

THE

Real Questions

QUESTIONS

Meditations on the Questions Jesus Asked

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I. Preface

The scene was the same every day. Early in the morning my wife, Pam, came into the room and found me in my chair, where she finds me every morning, as I was scratching through my Bible. “Whatcha looking for?” she asked.

My answer was always the same, “Lookin’ for questions.”

For most of my life I looked in my Bible for *answers*, but for nearly four years my early morning hours were devoted to my new assignment—looking for questions. When I first began my pursuit of the *Red-Letter Questions* in the Bible, my interest was quite detached from book development. It was pure intrigue. My fascination with Bible *questions* sprang from my disenchantment with Bible *answers*.

Since the age of fourteen, I had studied the Bible in a search for answers. At first, I needed only simple answers to resolve the simple questions of a youth who was just beginning life. As my life became more complicated, the questions became more complex. I needed more from my faith. So, naturally, I sought more from the Bible. Over time, I learned the languages, procured the translations, and reconstructed the history and the customs of civilizations past. I learned to dissect and analyze—*precept upon precept—line upon line—here a little, there a little*—until I was able to prove, codify, and solidify my theology into a flawless, inarguable reality.

Wasn’t this the way I was supposed to do it? *Precept upon precept, line upon line, here a little, there a little?* Wasn’t the Bible supposed to be my only source?

Didn’t Job say, “*I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food?*”¹ Job even wished for a Bible like ours when he said, “*I want the almighty to answer me. If He had only written a book, I would take it to myself and learn it and consider it as a crown to me.*”²

Through this technique I learned how to find the most obscure answers to any of the doctrinal trivia that may arise out of my fundamental dogma. I could point to Scripture after Scripture explaining in clear terms exactly what I believed (and why you should, too!).

¹ Job 23:12 (KJV)

² Job 31:35-36

I had fallen prey to a twisted kind of biblical *Gnosticism*.³ I had been convinced that the more I *knew*, the closer to God I would become. Somehow, I had it in my mind to get the answers I needed from the Bible. I was told that prayer should fill the disparity in my spiritual communications, but it was not a desire *to speak to Him* that made me feel so helpless—what I needed was to have *Him speak to me*.

I had, up to this point, gone to the Bible for the “conversation” I longed for. How many times I would open my Bible while considering a difficulty and say, “Well, let’s see what God says about it.” As I considered my lifelong pattern, I realized that my Bible had ever increasingly become my “god.” *But I had my answers!*

Remember, a person who has all the answers has no questions. That made me, by definition, a “know-it-all.” I was to learn the reality of this fantasy the hard way, over and over again, during the next twenty years.

In my mid-20s I commenced my first public ministry. It eventually included a church congregation, a children’s home, a Christian school, and my first radio broadcast. All was well. In each of my decisions I justified my stubborn (and sometimes sinful) position by Scripture and solid apologetics. My positions were inarguable, my theology was flawless, and my heart was blackened by self-deceit.

After several years, my “Utopia” began to disintegrate. I watched helplessly as each part of my life, home, and ministry was all lost, one by one, over the course of seven short days. I felt a mistaken kinship to Job, as my life, work, and family systematically vanished, but that was because I still thought that I was right.

Not learning much from my mistakes, I began again. In the years that followed I watched helplessly as two more of my attempts at ministry failed.

Although I felt that I had the “answers,” I realized that my faith was having no real effect on my life (i.e., I had no power over sin—many times not even recognizing it—nor had I any assurance of Jehovah’s hand in my life). Again, all I had set my hand to do crumbled, and I found myself helpless to change anything.

These were the years when the renowned preachers were falling one by one. I saw local and national ministries accused of scandalous misdeeds. I became more weary and disappointed and spent several years avoiding anything spiritual. I was angry. I was afraid. I saw *myself* in them.

Could You Repeat the Question, Please?

³ Gnostics believed that spiritual development was linked to *Gnosis* (knowing).

My struggle to understand continued. What happened to these men? What happened to me? It became obvious to me that I had learned the *words* and missed the *message*. Although I knew all about the Bible, I did not know its Author. I had answers, but what was the question again?

Job wanted answers. I wanted answers. Is it such a ridiculous thought to seek answers by seeking questions, I wondered?

Then, one day, it all turned around. While halfheartedly listening to the Bible on tape, I heard the Almighty speak in thunder to Job, “*WHO IS THIS THAT DARKENS COUNSEL BY WORDS WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE? STAND UP LIKE A MAN AND I WILL QUESTION YOU AND YOU WILL ANSWER ME FOR A CHANGE.*”⁴

Could it be that simple? Could my problem have been that I had been looking for *my answers* when my real task should have been to find and answer *His questions*?

Mark records the familiar story about the Pharisees demanding answers from Jesus. Jesus responded with this proviso, “*I will also ask of you a question. Answer me and I will answer you.*”⁵

This became a theme, a key to my Bible study and indeed my entire spiritual life. Could it be that I had spent the sum of my life gathering answers to questions of no value? Could it be that all of us are striving to answer questions formulated in our foolish minds when we should be answering the wise and prudent questions formulated in the mind of our God and Savior? Could it be that we are not even prepared to ask questions until we have fully answered Him on the basic issues about which *He questions us*?

Mine is not a story of a man who thought he was “saved” but wasn’t, nor is it a story of a man who finally found the “holy grail.” Rather, mine is a record of a progression of faith that is not only *available* to everyone, I am sure it is His divine plan for us all. I felt then, and still feel confident in His salvation, but I had no *relationship*—just words with no *conversation*. I had an affiliation but no *interaction*.

I am a different man today because I stopped *asking* and started *answering*. The answers that I had wrested and wrung out of the Scriptures to fill the voids and inconsistencies of my own doctrines have since evaporated into the expanse of HIS understanding. *My vain interrogations* have since become ridiculous in comparison to *His questions*.

At first, I was vexed about the new journey that lay ahead of me. With all of my previous foundations in rubble, I contemplated the changes that were taking

⁴ Job 38:2-3

⁵ Mark 11:29

place in my thinking. It frightened me. I would pray, “Are all my concerns to be forgotten?” No answer. “When will I get to ask *You* questions again?” No answer. I winced. Again, I found myself questioning Him! This would be a hard habit to break. I learned to relax.

One day, when I least expected it, my assignment became clear, the price became evident, and the reward came into focus. What would I be trading to seek this new understanding? I would only be trading my own wicked ways, my unrighteous thoughts for His! Good trade!

Then the Scriptures spoke within me, “*Let the wicked man forsake his way and the unrighteous his thoughts let him return to the Lord, that He may have mercy on him ...for he will abundantly pardon ... for my thoughts are not your thoughts nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord, for as the heavens are **higher** than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*”⁶

It was then that I *heard* within myself—as if He whispered to me personally, “*So are My questions **higher** than your questions.*”

I finally conceded, “*Okay, Lord, You ask and I’ll answer.*”

His Questions Must Take Precedence Over Ours

If you can, imagine having a one-hour appointment with the Creator of Heaven and Earth in which He has agreed to answer all of your questions—if you so desire. Can you also imagine walking into such a meeting, laying all your own questions aside, and asking, “*Lord, what questions do you have for me?*”

When it occurs to you that His questions have more power to educate, illuminate, and inform than any of the meager answers you have ever garnered from your religious experiences, you will gladly desire *questions* from your Lord rather than *answers*.

You will find that the mere contemplation of His questions can transform you. When this approach is applied to your study, you may find that it is necessary to experience a myriad of changes before you are even *able* to answer at all. Honesty may demand returning with a different answer at a later time.

Some of His questions will not even make sense until you are in the right place at the right time—with the right perspective.

His questions will require searching within and researching without. They will demand your time in meditation and your consideration throughout your day.

⁶ Isaiah 55:7-9 (author’s emphasis)

They will appear and reappear in your everyday life. They will occupy the background of your thinking in nearly every situation. They will culminate in such peace and power and understanding that you will be changed forever.

It could take a lifetime to answer just *one* of His questions, but answering just one of His questions will change you *forever!* There are no limits to His ways of teaching. His ways, as it is said, are “...*past finding out.*”

So perhaps, like me, you will begin searching for *questions* in your Bible instead of *answers*.

As a result of doing so, I have never been the same. You will not be the same either!

Ministry

It is inevitable that anyone who has a relationship with Jesus Christ will want to share that relationship with those around him; however, Paul warns us about those who have zeal without knowledge. (I'm afraid that the Body of Christ is presently overpopulated with people who fall into this category.)

Zeal is good. Unfortunately, it comes at the *beginning* of the relationship when *knowledge* is at a minimum. Equally unfortunate is the fact that as knowledge *increases*, zeal seems to *diminish*.

When, with passing years, we become saddened and discouraged in our relationship with the Lord, when people want little to do with the life that we have found in Christ, we should analyze their reluctance accurately.

Perhaps the world wants nothing to do with the philosophy that guides the average Christian, because many of us who have attempted to coax them into a spiritual relationship do not deal with faith *honestly*. In view of this very serious problem, we should see the need to overhaul the common idea of ministry.

Ministries that are less than reputable and honest have not helped our reputation. By "less than honest" I do not mean crooked, but those who take liberties with the intangible and arguable aspects of faith. We may have to answer for the misguided and unscrupulous men we have consented to by our silence, for it seems that their reputations receive the majority of the world's attention.

More importantly, we should learn from these ungodly men what *not* to do!

The red-letter questions can help us here. The questions Jesus asked pertaining to ministry can help us avoid the pitfalls of illogical theology, vain and empty faith in God, and an impertinent, ridiculous gospel message.

Foundation

Whatever ministry we find ourselves in will undoubtedly have a "political" structure. The foundation upon which our ministries are built must be anchored upon the philosophy (the doctrine) of Jesus Christ.

As the Messiah's ministry was drawing to a close, He realized the disciples seated before Him would continue to be ministers. Jesus taught by a physical example exactly *how He wanted their ministries to be founded*.

He arose at the supper, His last supper, and girded himself with a towel. Then He washed the feet of His disciples. When He was finished, He looked at them and asked, “Do you know what I’ve done to you?”⁷

Jesus was explaining by **example**: “I am a servant, and what I do to you, I expect you to do to others. You must mimic what I have done.”⁸

If our ministries are not *servicing* people, they are *outside* the framework that was established that night by the Lord Jesus. We are to be *servants*, not “shepherds” who reign over congregations (for there can be only ONE Shepherd).

In the example of our Lord, we must constantly pursue positions of lesser importance and promote others around us. Jesus never placed himself above those to whom He ministered. Among His disciples, He made no pretense that He was anything but their Lord; and further demanded that it was to be so, but when it came to *actual* service, He was always found as the One who served. We, too, should always be found as servants.

When Judas became an enemy and a traitor, Jesus reverted to the position of a servant washing feet. In the Garden of Gethsemane, just a few hours after this lesson in ministry, Judas appeared with silver jingling in the bag on his belt. He stepped toward Jesus.

The Master looked at him and addressed him as if nothing had changed, “Friend, why have you come?”⁹

It is curious that He would call Judas “friend.” Jesus easily could have said “Traitor, why have you come?” or “Enemy, why have you come?” I think there is a valuable lesson in His words—a lesson in humility, a lesson in *ministry*.

The Teacher, who taught that every idle word would be judged,¹⁰ would not use words indiscriminately. When He called Judas His friend, He must have meant exactly what He said. Judas had been a part of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus had been good to Judas. Now He assumed the role of a humble servant.

What a lesson in humility for us! We can see our example in the Lord’s humility—even to those who are only a few minutes from planning His betrayal. He did not become indignant by exalting himself even above His enemy. He did not condemn the betrayer, but rather, Jesus called him “friend.” By His self-mortification, Jesus opened an opportunity for debate, but no argument came. It was indeed true that Judas was treated as a friend all the way to the end!

⁷ John 13:12

⁸ John 13:14

⁹ Matthew 26:50 (NKJV)

¹⁰ Matthew 12:36

In the darkness Judas must have swallowed hard, but continued the treachery. He leaned over and kissed Jesus. In doing so, he confirmed, “No, Master, you have never treated me as anything other than a friend.”

His conscience was burning within his breast, and his hands were likely shaking, as he had to stand there and listen to the next question Jesus asked, “**Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?**”¹¹

It is unlikely that any ministry with which we involve ourselves will have a Judas-like member within the circle of influence; but, if there is, we will have neither right nor reason to judge that person or treat him or her any differently than anyone else. This is the mark of a minister who remembers the pit from which he was dug.¹²

A minister who has Jesus as his example is a servant who places his own interests *below* every soul within his influence. This is the foundation of true ministry. In many instances it would be very difficult to point out and identify many of the leaders of today’s conventional Christian congregations by comparing them to the altruistic, self-denying, servants of the people we are commanded to be.

Remember the words of the Lord Jesus. For it is still true today that many leaders “...love the best places at feasts, the best seats ...[they love] greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, ‘Rabbi’ [Pastor, Father, Reverend]. But you should not be called ‘Rabbi’¹³; for One is your Teacher, even Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant.”¹⁴

By His own exemplary life, the Lord taught us that we must be different! We have been given revelation. We are being shown by way of this revelation that servitude is primary and utmost in ministry. When this revelation begins to falter, our ministries begin to fail.

No doubt, we will be tested on this! The people to whom we minister *will* attempt to elevate us beyond our servant role.

¹¹ Luke 22:48 (NKJV)

¹² Isaiah 51:1

¹³ Exalted, teacher

¹⁴ Matthew 23:5-11

Penetrating Questions ... Profound Answers

Jesus was a Master Teacher. The questions He raised deal with the most important issues of life, and the insightful answers He gave apply directly to our lives in the twenty-first century.

This reader-friendly book takes an in-depth look at each of His questions and answers them in a well-organized and easy-to-follow format. The author's simple-and-direct approach shows how each of Jesus' questions demands a personal response from every believer.

Through clear and compelling examples this unique book reveals the spiritual priorities, principles, and practical applications behind each of Jesus' attention-grabbing questions, thereby enabling the reader to find personal answers for daily living.

The meditational style of *The Red-Letter Questions* is effective for:

- personal study and reflection
- group Bible studies and Sunday school classes
- family devotions

Paul prayed, "... that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened ..." (Ephesians 1:17-18, NKJV). After reading this book, your spiritual eyes will be opened, and you will grow greatly in your understanding of Jesus' truths.

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