

Gracious & Generous
“What Jesus said” series
Mark 8:27-38
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1. Do you find people who ask questions helpful or annoying?
2. Have you been a part of a church that discouraged inquiry into matters of faith? . . . that discouraged questions?
3. What questions of faith and life bother you the most?
4. Have you ever been in a situation where you changed the question you were asking and it really helped you see the way ahead clearly?
5. If the Presbyterian church has been called to love the Lord with “all the mind” where might some of the other Christian denominations fit in (with “all our heart, and soul, and strength”)?
6. Do you see Jesus as encouraging questions or discouraging questions?
7. Who do your friends say Jesus is?
8. What does it mean to you to call Jesus “Messiah”(Hebrew) or “Christ” (Greek)?
 - a. Do you see Jesus as your “Boss”?
 - b. If the Boss has been called to suffer, are we willing to follow him on the same path?
 - c. To what extent? How far?
9. Can you share a time
 - a. when knowing Jesus was your Messiah changed a decision you made?
 - b. when you thought that Jesus’ way would really mess up and harm your life?
 - c. When the mess Jesus made led to something wonderful?
 - d. When it was time to stop the questions and settle on an answer?
10. WHO is Jesus to YOU?

SOME GOOD QUESTIONS:

The Question of Evil: Why is there so much evil in the world if God is so Good and Powerful?

The Question of Good: If all there is, is random chance -- if there is no God

- Why is there *so much good* in the world?
- OR how is it that so much good repeatedly rises out of evil?
- AND why *do we* even feel that there *is such a thing* as “good and evil”? Where does this sense of good and evil come from?

The Question of Existence: Why is there something rather than nothing? -- how is it that we are here at all

The Question of Love and Relationship: why do we have a hunger to be loved? -- to be significant to someone else?

The Question of Jesus’ Existence: “Did Jesus really live?”

The Roman historian, Tacitus, writes within 50 or 60 years of Jesus’ life – describes Jesus as a historical figure, “*executed as a criminal by Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius!!*”

The Question of the Gospels:

F.F. Bruce, a classical scholar before he became a great New Testament scholar, reminds us that

- The oldest manuscript for Caesar’s *Gallic Wars* is roughly 900 years after Caesar’s day.
 - The two oldest manuscripts of Tacitus are 800 and 1,000 years later, than the original.
 - The earliest copies of Homer’s *Iliad* date from about 1,000 years after the original was authored around 800 B.C.
 - But with the New Testament, we have complete manuscripts from only 300 hundred years later.
 - Most of the New Testament is preserved in manuscripts fewer than 200 years after the original,
 - with some books dating from a little more than 100 years after their composition
 - and one fragment surviving within a generation of its authorship.
- No other book from the ancient world has *as small a time gap between composition and earliest manuscript copies* as the New Testament.

The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable, p.16

SOME GOOD BOOKS TO USE TO ASK QUESTIONS:

Keller, Timothy The Reason for God, Timothy Keller, 2008

Lewis, C.S. Mere Christianity

Stott, John, Basic Christianity

On one occasion nobel laureate Isidor Rabi -- whose work lay behind both the invention of the MRI and the microwave oven! -- was asked "Why he became a scientist? To which he replied:

"My mother made me a scientist without ever intending it.

Every other Jewish mother in Brooklyn would ask her child after school: 'So? Did you learn anything new today?' But not my mother.

She always asked me a different question. 'Izzy, she would say, 'did you ask a good question today?' That difference - asking good questions -made me become a scientist!"

Donald Sheff NYT Jan 12, 1988

David Sturt and Todd Nordstrom Forbes Magazine (October 2013)

The right question can be a disruptive agent, cutting through years of complacency to redirect a team or a company's focus.

It serves as a pointer, aiming us in the direction of the answer.

As Einstein put it (they write):

"If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on it, I would use the first 55 minutes determining the proper question to ask, for once I know the proper question, I could solve the problem in less than five minutes."

Caesarea Philippi was a center of religious pluralism

- With statues to the Greek God PAN,
- And a gleaming temple of white marble built for the worship of the Roman emperor as a god!

William Barclay (The Gospel of Mark) writes:

It is an amazing thing that it was here at Caesarea Philippi of all places that Peter saw in a homeless Galilean carpenter the Messiah .

- The ancient religion of Palestine was in the air, and the memories of false god Baal clustered around.
- The gods of classical Greece brooded over the place,
- The Jordan would bring back to memory episode after episode in the history of Israel and the conquest of the land.

- And clear in the eastern sun gleamed and glistened the marble of the holy place which reminded all people that Caesar was a god. Here, against this background of all religions and all history, Peter named this wandering teacher from Nazareth . . . the Messiah (Matthew's account = "Son of the Living God")

...

"If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

35For those who want to save their life will lose it,

and those who lose their life for my sake,

and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.

36For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life?

Inspector Montalbano and Livia

They both love each other . . .but not quite enough to change their way (and place) of life!

Paul Little was on a college campus talking to students about Jesus.

And one student was listening quite intently to the debate -- to the questions and the answers. And Paul Little turned to him and asked him this question He said, "**Have I answered all your questions?**"

And the student said, "Yes, you have."

To which Paul said, "**So, are you going to become a Christian, a follower of Jesus Christ?**"

To which the student replied, "*No, I'm not.*"

Which left Paul Little rather confused: →he'd answered all the questions.

But the student still said "*No, I'm not!*"

So he said to the student, "**Why not?**"

And he received an answer that was simple, remarkable, and brutally honest. The student replied,

"Well, because if I become a Christian, it will mess up my life."

Paul Little, *Know Why you Believe*, IVP, p.4.