

maranatha

The questions of JESUS

We learn a lot about Jesus through His questions. The Gospels show us that Jesus asked many questions which challenged His hearers. He continues to ask us questions today.

As a boy of 12 he went to Jerusalem for the Passover. At this season it was customary for theological and religious questions to be discussed in the Temple court. Jesus sat among the teachers *"listening to them and asking them questions"*. *"Everyone who overheard Him was amazed at his understanding...."* (Lk. 2.46 & 48).

His parents lost Him and after anxiously searching for Him were astonished to find Him questioning His elders. He then questioned His own parents. ***"WHY WERE YOU SEARCHING FOR ME? DIDN'T YOU KNOW I HAD TO BE IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE?"*** Clearly, at that young age He was aware of His anointing and He was not afraid to ask questions.

Much later in His ministry after He had preached and taught parables, healed and done miracles, He came to Caesarea Philippi where He bluntly asked His disciples ***"WHO DO PEOPLE SAY THE SON OF MAN IS?"*** (Matt. 16.13.). Today there is continuing controversy about Jesus – His nature and His calling. His disciples said that some were saying He was John the Baptist and others Elijah, Jeremiah, one of the prophets. Similarly, today some people call Jesus a good man or just a prophet, a leader or a moral teacher. Jesus turned to His disciples, and perhaps pointing an emphatic finger at them, said ***"BUT WHAT ABOUT YOU? WHO DO YOU SAY I AM?"*** (Matt. 16.15).

Simon Peter declared *"You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God"*. Today Jesus asks us the same question. Are we prepared to answer Him? Are we prepared to give an honest response?

When we affirm the nature of Christ He can use us mightily in the work of His Kingdom and in His building of His Church. Significantly, Jesus asked this question in an area full of pagan temples and in a place where Caesar worship was widespread. He asks this same question to us today in our increasingly pagan society with its competing belief systems.

Significantly, the risen Christ confronted Simon Peter who had denied Him three times and asked the same question three times ***"DO YOU LOVE ME?"*** Each time the question evoked a positive answer. He then commanded him *"Feed my lambs"* (Jn. 21.15-17). Today Jesus, whose name is freely blasphemed, whose message is widely rejected, asks the same question to each one of us. Do we truly love Him? Our response governs our whole way of life. It isn't simply a question of agreeing intellectually with some of His teachings, or admiring Him and even acknowledging Him as Lord. It is a question of entering into a close loving relationship with Him. His love casts out all our fears and empowers us to love others. The measure of our love for Him is the measure of the effectiveness of our work for His Kingdom.

When the disciples were with Him in the storm on the lake they were frightened and thought they were going to drown. After He had silenced the wind and stilled the storm, He then questioned His disciples – ***"WHERE IS YOUR FAITH?"*** (Lk. 8.25). This is a powerful message for Christians, and others, who are afraid. How strong is our faith? Do we honestly believe that perfect love casts out fear? Do we believe that if God is with us, all is well? Jesus would be familiar with the prophet's words *"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name, you are mine"* (Is. 43.1). The promise to God's people was very clear and was spelt out by the prophet. Though we may pass through the stormy waters, we will not be drowned and though we walk through fire we will not be burned. God clearly says *"Do not be afraid, for I am with you"* (Is. 43.5). In our fear-ridden, faithless society, Jesus challenges us with His question about our faith.

Similarly, He challenges those who proclaim His name, yet do not do His will. He asks ***"WHY DO YOU CALL ME, 'LORD, LORD', AND DO NOT DO WHAT I SAY?"*** (Lk. 6.46). His call is for real obedience and for the building of strong foundations in our life to withstand all the storms that may come upon us.

In His healing ministry, Jesus was on a confrontation course with many of the religious people of His time. One day when He was in the synagogue He met a man whose right hand was shrivelled. The Pharisees were looking for ways and means of getting Jesus into trouble for breaking the Law. Jesus challenged them ***"I ASK YOU, WHICH IS LAWFUL ON THE SABBATH: TO DO GOOD OR TO DO EVIL, TO SAVE LIFE OR TO DESTROY IT?"*** (Mk. 3.4). He said to the man *"Stretch out your hand"*. He did so and his hand was completely healed. Instead of welcoming this healing, they were furious and began to plot against Him. Today Jesus challenges every stumbling block which gets in the way of His healing ministry in our hurting, sick world.

The Gospels show how Jesus challenged selfishness and pointed the way to new relationships. He said it is easy to love our friends and urged His followers to go beyond this and to love our enemies. He questioned ***"IF YOU LOVE THOSE WHO LOVE YOU WHAT CREDIT IS THAT TO YOU?"*** and ***"IF YOU DO GOOD TO THOSE WHO ARE GOOD TO***

YOU, WHAT CREDIT IS THAT TO YOU?" (Lk. 6.32). These questions raise awkward issues for all those who have a self-centred, acquisitive life-style.

Similarly, when Jesus heard of the embarrassing dispute amongst His followers as to which of them was greatest, He told them that the greatest among them should be like the youngest and the one who rules, like the one who serves. As Lord and Master He said **"WHO IS GREATER, THE ONE WHO IS AT THE TABLE OR THE ONE WHO SERVES? IS IT NOT THE ONE WHO IS AT THE TABLE?"** Then He went on to say *"But I am among you as one who serves"* (Lk.22.27). Having said that He promised them that they would eat and drink at His table in His Kingdom.

The message of Jesus was about self-denial – of taking up a Cross daily. To those who want success, wealth and comfort, He says **"WHAT GOOD IS IT FOR A MAN TO GAIN THE WHOLE WORLD AND YET LOSE OR FORFEIT HIS VERY SELF?"** (Lk. 9.25).

Even His disciples appeared to want power and popularity. When James and John asked *"Let one of us sit at your right hand and the other at your left in your glory"*. Jesus answered *"You don't know what you are asking"* and challenged them - **"CAN YOU DRINK THE CUP I DRINK OR BE BAPTISED FROM THE BAPTISM I AM BAPTISED WITH?"** (Matt.20.22). They responded *"We can!"* Jesus said *"You will drink the cup I drink and be baptised with the baptism I am baptised with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared"*. He then called His disciples together saying *"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles laud it over them and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many"* (Mk. 11.35-45).

When Jesus healed a man who was born blind the Pharisees, far from being delighted, began to cross-examine the parents and their son. They even hurled insults at the young man who had received his sight back. Not knowing much about their theology or politics, he simply replied *"One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see"*. Jesus went to see him again and posed him the question **"DO YOU BELIEVE IN THE SON OF MAN?"** to which he replied *"Lord, I believe"* and he worshipped him (Lk.9.1-41).

Jesus said to Martha *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die"*. He then asked her – **"DO YOU BELIEVE THIS?"** (Jn. 11.26). We are called today to say "yes" to this fundamental claim of Jesus.

To those who would not believe Moses Jesus said **"SINCE YOU DO NOT BELIEVE WHAT HE WROTE, HOW ARE YOU GOING TO BELIEVE WHAT I SAY?"** (Jn. 5.47).

The questions of Jesus are direct. To two of John's disciples He asked – **"WHAT DO YOU WANT?"** (Jn. 1.38). To the invalid at Bethesda He asked **"DO YOU WANT TO GET WELL?"** (Jn. 5.6). The man was healed. To the blind man on the road side **"WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO FOR YOU?"** (Lk. 18.41).

He said he wanted to see, and Jesus healed him. To the two blind and mute men who followed him He asked **"DO YOU BELIEVE I AM ABLE TO DO THIS?"** When they said "yes" He touched them and they were healed (Matt. 9.28 & 29). What is He asking us?

Recognising the dangers of hypocrisy, Jesus asked **"WHY DO YOU LOOK AT THE SPECK OF SAWDUST IN YOUR BROTHER'S EYE AND PAY NO ATTENTION TO THE PLANK IN YOUR OWN EYE?"** (Lk. 6.42). Recognising the dangers of being led astray Jesus asked **"CAN A BLIND MAN LEAD A BLIND MAN? WILL THEY NOT BOTH FALL INTO A PIT?"** (Lk. 6.39). Often His questions have a rebuke in them – **"I HAVE SPOKEN TO YOU OF EARTHLY THINGS AND YOU DO NOT BELIEVE; HOW THEN WILL YOU BELIEVE IF I SPEAK OF HEAVENLY THINGS?"** (Jn. 3.12)

Having washed Simon Peter's feet as a Servant King, Jesus asked **"DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT I HAVE DONE FOR YOU?"** (Jn. 13.12). At the crucial moment in Gethsemane after He said to Peter, James and John *"Stay here and keep watch"*. He returned to find them sleeping. He said to Peter **"ARE YOU ASLEEP? COULD YOU NOT KEEP WATCH FOR ONE HOUR?"** (Mk.14.37). He went away again and once again He found them fast asleep. He returned a third time and still they were asleep. Is Christ speaking these words to His Church in this land today?

When the risen Lord met His disciples they were startled and frightened. He put the question to them – **"WHY ARE YOU TROUBLED AND WHY DO DOUBTS RISE IN YOUR MINDS?"** (Lk. 24.37). Does this challenge our doubts and troubled minds today? Are we prepared to look at His hands and His feet and hear Him say *"It is I myself! Touch me and see"*.

Some of the questions of Jesus are extremely simple: **"HOW MANY LOAVES DO YOU HAVE?"** (Mk. 6.38) or **"FRIENDS, HAVEN'T YOU ANY FISH?"** (Jn. 21.5) Whether His questions are simple or profound, He continues to ask them throughout our lives. Sometimes they will strike at the heart of our being. Occasionally they may embarrass. Often they may shock.

When we come before the Lord in prayer we give Him the opportunity to speak to our hearts. Prayer, is in part, conversation. When we pray we give Christ the opportunity to take the initiative and put His questions to us.

Long ago God said to Job **"I will question you and you shall answer me"** (Job 38.3). What is He asking us today? Are we prepared to respond?

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