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Questions Jesus Asked: A Question About Our Longings

John 1:35-39

The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and you will see." So they came and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.

We're beginning this morning a series entitled Questions Jesus Asked.

It must have been about four months ago when I read this statistic for the first time. I can't believe I haven't ever heard this in my spiritual journey. Having walked with Christ since I was eight years old, 50 years, and I'd never seen these stats before.

We have record in the gospel accounts of Jesus being asked approximately 187 questions. 187. He answers directly less than ten of them. And he himself asked well over 300 questions. He asked questions about people's faith, their doubts, their anxieties, their worries, their financial attitudes, their relationship with money and other things, their beliefs, their ideas. He asked questions about their bodies, their health, about eternity, about what they were thinking about, about the condition of their hearts. And on and on and on it goes.

Over 300 questions posed by Jesus, the greatest leader, the most influential leader of all times, used primarily questions to guide people's thinking and their thoughts, to direct them in life, to nurture them spiritually.

So today we begin looking at one of Jesus' questions. It's a very unique question. I want to read it again for you.

John writes this:

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples, and he saw Jesus passing by and he said, "Look, the Lamb of God." When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What are you looking for?"

What are you looking for?

It's an interesting question.

I want to make a few observations about it.

First of all, it's an open-ended question. Some questions are asked and they just require a short answer. Oftentimes we use little curt questions like this because we don't really want to engage a person very much. And so we ask a short question, and a yes or no, or maybe, or a fine comes back to us in a closed-type question.

But Jesus is asking here an open-ended question. He's inviting elaboration on an answer. He's looking to engage these two individuals. This is an invitation to dialogue. It highlights the personal, interactive nature of Jesus. He turns around and says, "What are you looking for?" And he's willing to listen to their response. He's opening a conversation.

Secondly, it assumes something of the hearer. It assumes that there is some intention going on in the hearers' hearts. "What are you looking for?" assumes you're actively doing something. You're pursuing something. There's something out there somewhere that you don't have that you wish you had, and you're actively trying to figure out what that is or where it is.

It assumes something.

It's an open-ended question. It assumes something of the hearer. And if you would agree with me, I think you would say this is an often-asked question. Often asked in our world. Personally, I get asked it all the time. Probably most often I get asked it by my wife. And she adds a little caveat at the end.

"Hey Tim, what are you looking for? Your billfold again? Your glasses? Your phone?"

Now she has a little different edge to it in the kitchen. I'll open the refrigerator at times, not really sure what I'm looking for, and I'll open it.

Now you understand, this is her domain. She's in charge of the refrigerator, so she gets a little nervous when I go to the refrigerator because she has it where she likes it. And so when I stand there and I open it, and if it's more than one or two seconds that I'm peering into it, she does get nervous. And she asks the question, "Hey, babe, what are you looking for?" And then she says, "Maybe I could help you find it."

I get asked it in grocery stores. I don't go in there very often, but sometimes I'm looking for something in there because I've been given a direction of something to pick up. And I get in there and I don't know what happens to me, but I get confused in grocery stores. And people must be able to see that because it's not just workers who are there, but it's also other patrons of these stores.

And I just had this happen the other day. I was in there and I was looking for a particular item. And this other customer said, "Sir, can I help you?"

I said, "Yeah, you really could. I'm looking for such and such."

She said, "Ah, I don't, I don't know where that is."

And there was a coworker right there. And so she asked the coworker, "Hey, do you know where such and such is?"

And she said, "Yeah, it's over there on aisle seven."

She turned to me and said, "Hey, over there on aisle seven," she said.

And then she said this: "That's the difference between men and women. Women aren't afraid to ask for directions."

Literally said that.

I get asked this question on the farm by my children when I'm a little agitated.

"Dad, what are you missing? What tool do you need?"

It gets asked a lot, but this question rings a little bit different, at least in my ears. I don't know if you'd agree with me when I consider Jesus asking, as if he doesn't know, "What are you looking for?"

It's an open-ended question, inviting dialogue with a personal God. It assumes that we're searching for something, that we're taking initiative in some way. It's an often-used question, but there's a context to this question.

Let me read it again.

The next day, John was there again with two of his disciples. These were followers of John. These were disciplined people. Disciples are disciplining themselves in a direction to learn and to grow and to mature. They're giving their hearts and minds and souls to the educating of their whole being. A disciple is a disciplined person.

They've been following John, learning from John. They're committed to John. But when he saw Jesus passing by, and understand this is John's mindset, he says this about himself: "I must begin to decrease so Jesus can increase."

And he's handing the baton to Jesus because he said, "Jesus, he's much greater than me. I am unworthy to even tie his sandals."

And so he says, when Jesus shows up again the next day, "Look, the Lamb of God, the sacrificial one, the one sent by our Almighty God to pay the penalty for our sins. That's him," he says.

And when the two disciples heard this, they abandoned John, and they followed Jesus.

Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What are you looking for? What are you looking for?"

Let's consider Jesus asking this question in a few different contexts.

These two men are making a great change in their life, and Jesus is asking them why. What's driving it?

When you're leaving one job, maybe you've quit. Maybe you've been fired, I don't know. But when you decide to make a major change in your profession, direction of your life, what if Jesus showed up and asked you, "What are you looking for? Are you looking for more satisfaction in your work? Something that fits your gifts better? More money? What's driving you?"

What if Jesus stood out here at the door every Sunday morning when you got up and came to worship and he said, "Hey. Welcome to worship. When you go in there to that worship center, what are you looking for? What are you trying to get out of this? What's driving you?"

What if Jesus showed up sometime when you were scrolling online in that doom scroll, and he just put his hand over your phone and said, "Hey, hey, hey, do you mind me asking what you're doing there? What are you looking for? What are you looking for?"

When you're mapping out your schedule for a day or a week or a year, and mapping out your children's activities, your budget, your time, what if Jesus was sitting there beside you asking this question?

How about when you're heading into the department store for the third time this week? Or you're placing your 12th order on Amazon, and Jesus shows up. Do you feel this question?

"What are you looking for?"

How about when you're grumbling or complaining to your boss, or coworker, or a family member about something or someone? What if he asked you then?

Or when you're heading into a casino, or a pub, or a club? How would you answer him then?

How about maybe if you've ever done this like I have? You're dropping names of famous people you've met, or neat things you've done, at a gathering of people. What if he just slipped up beside you and said, "You know, while you're sharing all those things, what are you looking for? What are you looking for?"

It's a good question, isn't it?

It's the most often-asked question of Jesus in the scriptures, that he asks some form of it: "What or who are you looking for?"

It's a deeply probing question. It's a question about the longings of the human heart, the desires. It's not easily answered.

Now, this is just my opinion here, but I think it's a grace-filled question. It's just grace. God coming to us and asking us to be honest with ourselves. To be self-aware. In deep love and service to us, he asks us to think on, reflect on, and consider our actions and our activities and what's driving them.

Why do you think he would ask this question more often than any other question? Why?

When you come in here, what are you looking for? When you're going there, what are you looking for? When you're doing this, what are you looking for?

Why would he ask this more than any other question?

I think it's because he knows something about us.

When I graduated from high school in 1986, there was a band. It's still around today. It's called U2, and they wrote a song that became very popular. And the song had these lyrics in it:

I have climbed the highest mountains. I've run through the fields. I've run, I've crawled. I have scaled these city walls, these city walls.

And then the chorus just sings again and again:

But I still haven't found what I'm looking for. No, I still haven't found what I'm looking for.

It gets us in touch, this question, with deeper longings, the spiritual longings in the core of our heart and our soul.

Maybe Jesus used this question more often because he knows that in our current state here on the earth, we're all seekers of a sort in our broken humanity. We do often, because of our sinful nature, settle for far less than we should. And he wants to keep us seeking for more. Not live beneath our privilege as his people, but live into the fullness of the way he designed us. Not to settle for less.

The great author, C.S. Lewis, came across this idea as he was studying the scriptures. A great theologian, as he looked through Jesus' teaching and his writing, he wrote in his book *The Weight of Glory*. He said:

"It would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition and the control of things, when infinite joy, infinite freedom, infinite peace, the hope of eternity is available to us all."

Maybe Jesus is trying to draw us out of our temporary pleasures, our false securities, into him.

What are you looking for?

One of my absolute favorite passages in Scripture is found in Acts 17. If you've been around here, you probably have come to see that.

It simply says this:

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth. He is the highest being there is. He's the King of Israel, the great I Am, the one who was and is and is to come. He was there before us. He'll be there forever. He is not served by human hands as if he needs anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else.

From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth. He marked out their appointed times in history, the boundaries of their lands. And he did this. Why? So that we might seek him. Perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from us. Very near.

And then the writer of Acts, Luke, says this:

"For in him we live and move and have our being."

In him.

The psalmist understood this.

King David:

"As a deer pants after water, so my soul longs for thee, O God. Where can I go and meet with God? My soul thirsts for the living God. My soul thirsts for him."

What are you looking for?

We're far too easily pleased.

After a life of seeking and searching, Saint Augustine boldly opened his spiritual autobiography, which he entitled Confessions.

Confessions.

In deep honesty and vulnerability, the saint of God began his book, saying this:

"You have made us, O Lord, for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you."

We're all looking for him. Everyone on the planet is looking for him.

Let's read the text again.

Turning around, Jesus saw them following. They'd left John. John had pointed them to Jesus. Jesus turned around and asked them, "What are you looking for?"

They said, "Well, where are you staying? Where are you staying?"

"Come," Jesus said, "come and you will see."

So they went. They saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him.

I hope you come here to meet with him.