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Questions Jesus Asked: A Question About Our Conversations

Mark 9:33-37

And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?" But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

We are continuing looking at questions that Jesus asked while he was here on the earth that are recorded for us. And he is really, by any historical standard, known as the greatest leader of all times in human history. No one has influenced the world more. There is no more books been written about anyone more than Jesus. He is known by many of us, and many down through history, as their leader.

Many of us refer to him as the Shepherd of our souls. Jesus said of himself, I am the good Shepherd. He claimed this of his own fruition. I know my own, he said, and my own know me, just as the father knows me and I know the father. Jesus claimed to be in harmony with Almighty God, and to be in harmony with Jesus than is to be in harmony with God. A little later in that same chapter, John chapter ten, Jesus said this: I and the father are not only related, we are one. This is Jesus claim to be God here. It's important, I think, when we study Jesus life, to keep this in mind. And there are specific characteristics that are revealed to us about God in the scriptures that we should keep in mind when we study Jesus. And for this particular passage, there's one characteristic about God that's important. I want to put it in the context of three.

There are many names for God in the Jewish vernacular. Not so many in the English, but in the Jewish vernacular. God has descriptive names that we often call Lord or God simply in the Bible. The very first one, pronounced in a different way than we pronounce it in English, is found in the very first verse of the Bible, where it says, in the beginning Elohim created the heavens and the earth.

Elohim is a reference to the power of our creator God as all powerful and ruler and judge of not just the earth, but all of the universe. In the beginning, Elohim, God the creator, created. By the time we get to Genesis 17, we're introduced to another name for God. And this is the time when God comes to Abraham. When he's 99 years old, he's known as Abraham, and God changes his name, and he says, I am El Shaddai. He uses a different characteristic of his nature in this name. I am El Shaddai, signifying one who is of ultimate power, God Almighty.

Now, by the time we get to first Samuel chapter two, verse three, Hannah sings a song and uses yet a different Jewish name for God, and that is the name El Dia El dia. This is a name designating God as all knowing. Omniscient is the word that we use to describe this aspect of the nature of God. I want you to keep God and Jesus omniscience in mind as we look at today's text.

They, Jesus and his disciples, came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house, he asked them our question for the day: What were you discussing on the way? Remember, this is the omniscient God. He is not asking this question because he has what we in our family call FOMO. He doesn't have fear of missing out on what was discussed as they were traveling on the road.

We have this in our family. Most of us have a certain amount of FOMO. There are often times when we're going to discuss something as a topic in our family, and one of us will say, hey, I can't be there at that time. Can you wait until I get there? Because I don't want to miss out on the conversation. This is not Jesus stance here. He is omniscient. He knows what has been discussed, but in his leadership style, he often uses questions to draw us out, to help us look in a mirror and reflect on ourselves, and become more self aware of what's happening in our lives. And so he asked them this question: What were you discussing on the way? What was going on in your conversation?

Why would Jesus ask this? I want to give you perhaps three reasons, biblical reasons. The first would be our conversations reveal to us and to others what's in our hearts. Jesus unequivocally said this, an absolute truth. Now we can disguise it for a while if we want, but eventually, out of the abundance of the heart, our mouth will speak. What's true about what's happening in our hearts will eventually come out of our mouths in one way or another. Jesus might be asking this question of his disciples so that they can reflect on what's in their heart by the topic and nature of their conversation that they were having, that they thought they were in obscurity from God.

In our conversations reveal what comes out of our mouth, the topic of our conversations, the nature of our conversations, reveal to us and others about what's in our hearts. Secondly, if you read through the scriptures, we understand that God and Jesus, being one and the same, they care deeply about what's going on in our hearts. They care above almost all other things in our lives about what's true in here for us.

When Samuel went to pick a new king For the Israelite nation, he went. And he saw some young men, sons of Jesse, who looked like, on the outside, they would be good kings. Worldly appearances, external appearances, reputations, skills, abilities. But as Samuel was looking over these young men, the Lord came to him and said to him, the Lord does not see. As man sees, man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.

King Solomon, David's son, whom Samuel would anoint as king later, would write this in his book of Proverbs. Inspired by the Spirit of God, the motives of a person's heart are weighed by the Lord. The writer of Hebrews would later write this: the Word of God is living and active. And that is true because the Word of God is actually Jesus. He is the living word. In the beginning was the word. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

Now through his inspired word, the spirit divides our soul from our spirit. It is the living Spirit of Christ that applies the word to the human heart to give us discernment there. And it says this. It discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart internally. What's going on in here? No creature is hidden from his sight. All are laid bare and exposed to the eyes of him. Notice he's referencing Jesus as the living word, the eyes of him to whom we must all give an account.

Now Jesus is training his young disciples, these zealous young men, and he's talking to them, and he's exposing to them what's in their heart with this question. He cares deeply about our hearts. And he also knows that the words that we use in conversation with others can have a huge impact on them and on the world around us.

James says this about the words that come out of our mouths. They can guide our whole lives like a bit can guide a horse or a rudder can guide a ship. Words are very powerful. The words that we use, life and death are in the tongue. King Solomon said they can cause our words great destruction, like a tiny flame that can burn down a whole forest. And so King Solomon spends many of his proverbs addressing the way we talk to one another, and so does the whole Bible.

A gentle tongue, Solomon said, is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue can crush a spirit. Where words are many, he said, sin is not far away. A deceitful person can stir up strife with their tongue. A slanderer can separate even the closest of friends. But he says this: when there is no more wood, a fire goes out. And so when gossip is stopped, a quarrel will die down.

And so Paul, under the inspiration of the spirit to the believers in Ephesus and then to us down through history, says, let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, only that which is good for the building up of others, that it may give grace to those who hear. And if you don't follow this, you may grieve the heart of God.

This question reveals to us that God cares about our conversations and what we say to one another, even in obscurity. But it also reveals to us that God wants you and I to be aware of and care about our words.

They, Jesus and his disciples, came to Capernaum, and he was in the house. And he asked them, what were you discussing on the way? But they kept silent. Have you ever experienced that? Sometimes I will enter a room where two of my grandchildren are, and they're whispering to each other. And I'll say, hey, what are you guys talking about? And they go silent.

I have had this experience in my life where someone walks into a room and said, hey, what are we talking about? And no one wants to respond. Why? Why did the disciples go silent? Might I conjecture that they were embarrassed about what they were talking about? They were embarrassed because the content of their conversation was carnal and they knew it.

Now that's a big word, carnal. It means fleshly or worldly. The content of their conversation was selfish. It was greedy. It was self-serving. It was self-preserving in nature. It was sort of a back room political conversation argument that they didn't know Jesus might know about.

They kept silent. The text says, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. Now, this is not uncommon for young men. I used to argue about this with my cousins all the time. It's like there are 12 Muhammad Ali's arguing with each other. I am the greatest of all time. No you're not. I am the greatest. And when I was in Harlan with the young men that I hung out with, we did this a lot. Now, we kind of knew we were joking, but we kind of weren't. We were sort of like chesting up on each other.

These are young men, and Jesus is training them to be his disciples. And they have gotten caught now arguing about fleshly and worldly things. Who knows what area of greatness they were talking about? It doesn't really matter.

Jesus is exposing to them the nature and the motives that are going on in their hearts. They kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another. And he, Jesus, sat down and called the 12 now together. This is a real come to Jesus moment. Let's all come sit down, Jesus says. Let's have a little talk together. A literal Come to Jesus.

And he said to them. His disciples. If any of you would be first, he must be last of all. The kingdom of God is contrary to the way the world thinks. It's upside down. If any of you would be first, you must be the last, the servant of all. But his words must not have been getting through to them. And so he decides to use an illustration.

He took a child, he says child. A dependent one. The most vulnerable. The least of these. In the midst of these young men. And he put him in the midst of him. I wonder how long Jesus took taking this child and just setting this child in the midst of these young. Testosterone ridden men. And then he took the child in his arms.

I don't know if you've been around children lately, but I have a picture of one young child here. He looks so tough on the left. So tough. And on the right. He's being a child. Vulnerable. Dependent. The least of these.

He took a child, put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, whoever receives one such child in my name receives me. Do you understand the softness of heart that Jesus is wanting his disciples to develop? Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me. Whoever receives me receives not me, but also God. As much as you do it unto the least of these, Jesus would teach you, do it to me.

Well, they didn't get it. They didn't sink in on him. Just in the next chapter, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, these zealous young men, came up to him and said to him, teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you. And he said to them, what do you want me to do for you?

He said to them, Grant us to sit one at your right hand, the strong arm, one at your left hand. The compassionate arm of you and glory. We want to be your top two dogs.

Jesus said to them, to sit at my right hand or my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those who have been prepared for them. You know when we have worldly, behind the scenes jockeying conversations. Dissension is enhanced, tension is enhanced. And that was true for the disciples. It's true for all communities.

And that's what happened here. These two did a backroom meeting with Jesus, and when the ten heard this, they became indignant at James and John. So Jesus had to have come to Jesus meeting number two. And then he just said it plain to them. He said this, you know, those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles are authoritarian in the way they lead. Their great ones, exercise authority over them. But not so with you. We don't work that way. We don't do the The political games.

Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant. And whoever would be first among you must be the slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

The question for today is, how are your conversations? What are you talking about that you think nobody sees? Do you have a clean conscience before God in these things? Jesus is discipling his disciples so that they can see what's in their heart and move farther in the process of cleansing and sanctification of what's in here.

Oftentime at the end of teachings, Jesus would say, those who have ears, let them hear.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for the chance to gather in this room. We thank you for your mercies being new every morning. We thank you that we have understood that when we're in you, there is no condemnation for us in our hearts.

Father, we ask that you would be the one who continues to search us and make us aware by your spirit. When we're doing things or discussing things with people that are displeasing to you. We ask that you would. You would help us hear the question when we need to hear the question.

Thank you, father, for this place that we can seek you together and encourage each other in our faith. Journeys continue to shape and mold us in as individuals and as a part of your church family in the world.

We pray this together in Jesus name, Amen.