**LIFE’S MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION**

**(Matthew 22:41-46)**

The traveler arrived at the airport and then made her way through security. On the way to her gate, she stopped at one of the many stores that line the concourse. She bought a magazine and a little package of cookies to eat as she read her magazine. When she got to the waiting area next to her gate, she settled in a seat. There was an empty seat between her and a male traveler. She pulled out her magazine and began reading.

She hadn’t gotten two paragraphs into the first article when she heard a rustling sound. She looked down at the empty seat next to hers and noticed that the stranger two seats from her had picked up her package of cookies, opened it, and he quietly claimed the first cookie for himself.

She didn’t say anything, but she wanted to emphasize that this was her package of cookies; so, she reached in and took the next one for herself. A minute or so later, there was another rustling sound. The man was helping himself to another cookie. Between the two of them, they finished off the entire package, but when there was only one left, the man picked it up, broke it in two, handed one half to the lady and ate the other half.

The woman was speechless. The man got up and left, and moments later, the woman’s flight number was called. She opened up her purse to retrieve her boarding pass. As she looked into her purse, both to her shock and embarrassment, there was her unopened package of cookies.

When there is conflict and discord, we automatically assume that it is the fault of somebody else. When you and your spouse are at odds, it is obviously the fault of your spouse. Who else could it be? When you and your children aren’t getting along, they are the ones to blame. They need to get their act together. When you and a neighbor have a tiff, it is the other guy who is in the wrong.

That is the way we think. It never even occurs to us that just maybe we are the ones who are guilty of a bad attitude, of bad behavior, of bad judgment.

We have been looking at Matthew 22. In this one chapter, three different groups come to Jesus to ask Him questions. They have already determined that He is the bad guy. Their questions are designed to trip Him up so they can justifiably accuse Him of thinking, saying, and doing wrong things—things bad enough that He would be worthy of receiving a death sentence.

On each occasion, Jesus deftly sidesteps the political or theological land mine they have place in front of Him. Each group walks away, murmuring under the breath, “Foiled again.”

Today, we come to the last six verses of Matthew 22. Now, it is Jesus’ turn to go on the offensive. Like them, He asks questions. Jesus was a master at using interrogatives.

I am reminded of the frustrated student who asked his teacher, “Why do you always answer our questions with a question?”

The wizened teacher stroked his chin and replied, “Do I?”

As we read our text, we are going to come across four sentences that end with a question mark. In my Bible, each of those questions are in red ink. That means Jesus was the one who was asking this barrage of questions.

I believe the most important questions are the first two: “What do you think about the Christ?” and “Whose son is He?”

There are three key characters in our text—the Pharisees, Jesus, and David. We are going to consider each and learn from them three key lessons about “Life’s Most Important Question.”

1. **LIKE THE PHARISEES, WE MUST FACE LIFE’S MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION.**

Jesus could very well have asked, “What do you think about Me? Whose son, am I?” For obvious reasons, He didn’t do that. You and I, however, live on the other side of the cross and the other side of the resurrection. We know very well that Jesus was referring to Himself when He spoke about the Christ or the Messiah. Life’s greatest question is, “What are you going to do with Jesus?”

* Will you receive Him or reject Him?
* Will you listen to Him or ignore Him?
* Will you believe Him or disbelieve Him?

This conversation took place on Tuesday of Passion Week. Three days later, on Friday morning, Jesus stood before Pilate, the Governor of Judea. The Jews did not have the legal authority to carry out capital punishment. They were an occupied nation. They were part of the Roman Empire, and only Roman authority could sentence a man to death and then carry our that sentence. That being the case, the Jewish authorities brought Jesus to Pilate and told Pilate that Jesus was worthy of death.

Pilate interrogated Jesus. He was unable to uncover any reason to execute Jesus, but he also realized that he had a mob on his hands. These pesky Jews could cause trouble for him. Let’s read how Pilate attempted to handle this problem. Look at Matthew 27:15-23.

Based on a dream she had, Pilate’s wife warned him to have nothing to do with Jesus. That wasn’t exactly helpful counsel. He was the Governor. He had to do something. Finally, Pilate turned to the crowd and asked them an important question. Look at v. 22. Pilate didn’t realize how important a question that was. Pilate asked the question in an immediate sense. All of us need to ask that question in an ultimate sense.

Pilate tried not to decide. In the end, Pilate let the angry mob decide. It occurs to me that after 2000 years, a great many of today’s politicians are just like Pilate. Instead of standing up for what they know is right, they are letting angry mobs determine public policy. That will have disastrous consequences.

When it comes to Life’s Most Important Decision, you can’t decide not to decide, and you can’t let someone else decide. If we don’t say “yes” to Jesus, all other responses are a “no.” Jesus said in Matthew 12:30, “Whoever is not with Me is against Me.”

Everyday, you and I make decisions. We make a host of decisions. According to Columbia researcher Sheena Iyengar, the average person makes about 70 decisions every day. That’s 25,500 decisions a year. Over 70 years, that comes to 1,788,500 decisions. After so much practice, we really ought to do better at choosing than we do.

Is there anybody here who would say, “Honestly, I’m indecisive. I have trouble making decisions.” Just raise your hand. Many of you had trouble deciding whether you should raise your hand or not.

If you have difficulty in choosing, you don’t want to go to a large-sized American supermarket. You will be overwhelmed. If your spouse says, “I don’t like our toothpaste. Let’s try Crest.” You say, “OK.” You get to the store and discover there are 27 varieties of crest.

You decide you want some soup. You remember that your mom always bought Campbell’s Soup. That certainly narrows your choices, but Campbell’s has 53 different kinds of soup.

Sometimes you know what you want, you just don’t know how much to get of what you want. If you want Tropicana Pure Premium Orange Juice, that’s great, but they have eight sizes to choose from, anywhere from 8 to 128 ounces.

Let’s say you want ice cream. To make it simply, you want vanilla ice cream, and you like Breyer’s ice cream the best. That sounds really simply, but when buying Breyer’s vanilla ice cream, you have to decide, “Do I want: Natural, French, Half the Fat, No Sugar Added, Extra Creamy, Homemade, Lactose Free, or Carb Smart?

Have you been down a cereal aisle recently? Your head will swim with all the choices. If you want Cheerios, that certainly narrows your choices, but you still have to decide between Original, Honey Nut, Honey Nut Medley Crunch, Apple Cinnamon, Banana Nut, Frosted, Chocolate, Multi Grain, Multi Grain Peanut Butter, Dulce de Leche, Cinnamon Burst.

Men, if your wife sends you to the supermarket to get some Tide liquid laundry detergent, ask her to be more specific. Does she want: Original Scent, Plus Febreze, Plus Febreze Sport, Free & Gentle, Plus Bleach Alternative, Coldwater, Clean Breeze, Mountain Spring, Plus Downy, or Tide with Acti-Life?

Men, if you ask your wife to get you some Head & Shoulders shampoo, she has to choose between Active Sport, Old Spice, Deep Clean, Hair Endurance, Refresh, Extra Strength for Men, Citrus Breeze, Ocean Lift, Dry Scalp Care with Almond Oil, Classic Clean, Sensitive Scalp Care, Itchy Scalp with Eucalyptus, Smooth & Silky, Extra Volume, Green Apple, Damage Rescue, Extra Strength, Clinical Strength, or any of seven more.

We shouldn’t be surprised that a *Consumer's Reports* survey of nearly 3,000 shoppers in 2014 found that 36 percent of shoppers “were overwhelmed by the information they had to process to make a buying decision.”

The 20th century philosopher, Albert Camus, said, “Life is a sum of all your choices.” In other words, when you add up all of your 1,788,500 during your first 70 years, that is who you are.

Of all of those many, many decisions, there is just one that determines your eternal destiny. It revolves around the question, “What will you do with Jesus?” I urge you to trust Him; receive Him as your Savior and Lord. Then, follow Him. Do what He tells you to do; go where He calls you to go, and say what He impresses upon You to say.

1. **LIKE JESUS, LET US KEEP ASKING LIFE’S MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION.**

Jesus could have asked those Pharisees any question under the sun. He could have asked, “Why are you guys so mean? What have you got against Me anyway?” Life’s most important question, however, is centered on the world’s most important Person; so, Jesus talked about Himself without using His name.

When you are getting to know someone, you talk about all kinds of things. First, you may talk about the weather. As you feel more comfortable, you ask questions about the other person’s family, their work, their interests, their hobbies. You may even talk about their travels, their goals, their hopes. At some point, however, you need to pivot and talk about matters of faith—their spiritual beliefs, their religious practices, their connection or lack of it to a religious organization. Eventually, you and I need to talk to others about Jesus. People need to hear about Jesus more than they need to hear about how great our church is.

Jesus did not say, “Go into all the world and help people feel better about your church.” We are to make disciples. A disciple is a follower and a learner. We need to talk about the One we want them to follow and the One we want them to learn about, and that Person is Jesus.

I support what is called “confrontational evangelism.” That simply means that every man, woman, boy, and girl should be confronted with the claims of Christ. We should tell everyone, “This is who Jesus is. This is what Jesus did. This is what Jesus asks of you. Now, will you give your heart and life to Jesus?”

Some people promote what is called “lifestyle evangelism.” We should all seek to life a godly lifestyle, but I don’t care how good you are. The truth is that regardless of how kind you are or how good are, no one will know that Jesus is the Son of God, that Jesus died on a cross to pay for our sin, and that we need to ask Jesus to forgive us and to take control of our lives until we actually tell them. Lifestyle evangelism may help prepare a person to be more receptive of the gospel, but he/she won’t believe the gospel and receive Jesus until they hear about Him.

Recently, I read an article that argued against our use of the word *share* when it comes to the work of evangelism. *Share* is one of our most used catchphrases to describe telling someone else about Jesus. We talk about sharing the gospel and sharing Jesus with another person. The chief problem with the word *share* is that it is never used in the Bible to describe evangelism.

The Greek word for gospel is *euangelion,* and the Greek word proclaiming the gospel is *euangelidzo.* We get the words *evangelism, evangelist,* and *evangel* from those words. We don’t just share the gospel. We preach it; we proclaim it; we announce it. We are ambassadors who deliver the message of our King.

The idea of proclaiming the gospel has fallen into disfavor in our society. People complain, “Don’t preach to me; I don’t want to be preached at by anyone.” Preaching, however, is exactly what we are called to do, and you don’t have to be a preacher to proclaim the gospel, the good news of Jesus.

The book, *A Place for Truth*, contains an essay by Tim Keller, a pastor and church planter who lives and serves in New York City. Keller claims that he often hears people say, “I don't know which religion is true” or “No one can know the truth.” According to Keller, this often leads to a conversation that goes something like this:

I’m talking to someone who does not believe in Christianity or Christ. At some point he or she responds to me suddenly, “Wait a minute, what are you trying to do to me?”

I respond, “I’m trying to evangelize you.”

“You mean you’re trying to convert me?”

“Yeah.”

“You’re trying to get me to adopt *your* view of spiritual reality and convert *me*?”

“Yeah.”

“How narrow! How awful! Nobody should say that their view of spirituality is better than anybody else and try to convert them to it. O no, no, no. Everybody should just leave everybody else alone.”

“Wait a minute . . .” I say. “You want me to adopt your take on spiritual reality; you want me to adopt your view of all the various religions. What are you doing to *me*? What you’re saying is, you have a take on spiritual reality, and you think I would be better off and the world would be better off if we adopted yours. I have my take on spiritual reality and I think mine is better than yours, and I’m trying to convert you to mine . . . If you say, ‘Don't evangelize anybody,’ that is to evangelize me, into your Western, white, individualistic, privatized understanding of religion.”

Keller concludes by stating,

Who’s narrower? It’s not narrow to make an exclusive truth claim because *everybody* makes an exclusive truth claim . . . Everybody has a take on reality. Everybody thinks the world would be better if those people over there adopted mine. Everybody. Narrowness is not the *content* of a truth claim. Narrowness is our attitude toward the people who don’t share our point of view.

If someone thinks you are narrow, you are probably doing the very thing Jesus has called you and I to do—to preach the gospel. He didn’t call us to share it. To proclaim the gospel involves asking someone life’s most important question. Ask people what they think about Jesus. Who son is He? Ask them what they are doing with Jesus.

1. **LIKE DAVID, WE CAN GET HELP WITH LIFE’S MOST IMPORTANT**

**QUESTION.**

Look closely at what Jesus said in v. 43. How did David call the Messiah, “my Lord”? He did so in the Spirit, Jesus said. David was guided by the very Spirit of God. Those psalms of

David that appear in the middle of your Bible are not the work of David’s imagination or even David’s genius. He was not inspired the way that popular song writers are today who say, “Oh, I was inspired to write this song.” Inspiration for them is a very human and emotional thing.

Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16, “All Scripture is breathed out by God . . .” The word inspired literally means “God-breathed.”

The point that Jesus was making was the He, being the Christ, the Messiah, existed before David. In fact, He is eternal. He had no beginning. He will have no end. He is called the son of David because He came through line of David, but He is more properly the Son of God.

David did not come to that conclusion through rational means. It wasn’t the result of long study. He knew it because the Spirit of God revealed it to him.

Paul weighed in on this idea. Look with me at what Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:9-16. We come to know spiritual truth through the activity of God’s Spirit in our lives. He reveals truth, and if He didn’t, we wouldn’t know that truth. Those without the Spirit of God don’t see and don’t know the truth we know. The natural person of v. 14 is the person who has not the Spirit of God within Him. If you are a believer, you are a super-natural person because you have the supernatural Spirit of God living within you. He is your teacher, and He reveals truth to you as you seek His guidance and help.

When you pick up the Bible, which is the sword of the Spirit, according to Ephesians 6:17, pray, “Dear Holy Spirit, You are the author of this Book. Help me to understand what You inspired men of old to write. Help me to know what it means and how it applies to my life today.” He will answer that prayer because that is His job. Jesus said that the Spirit is our teacher who will guide us into all truth.

One truth that only He can impart to us is the true identity of Jesus Christ. Look with me at 1 John 4:2-3, 13-15.

We come to church looking for answers. My study of the Bible leads me to the conclusion that God is not very interested in giving us answers. What He really likes to do is give us questions because questions force us to wrestle and ponder and search.

We often say that Jesus is the answer, and He is, but I came across a book entitled, *Jesus Is the Question.* The author, Martin Copenhaver, is a pastor. He claims that in the gospels Jesus asks 307 different questions. Jesus was also asked 183 questions. Of those more than 180 questions that was asked of Jesus, He only answered 8 of them. Copenhaver wrote, “Jesus is 40 times more likely to ask a question than to give a direct answer.”

Copenhaver also pointed out that there are three questions that Jesus chose to repeat. When Jesus says something once, that is worthy or our attention, but when Jesus says something more than once, we really need to listen. The three questions Jesus asked more than once are:

1. What are you looking for?
2. What do you want Me to do for you?
3. Do you love Me?

Let me encourage you to wrestle with those questions. Keep asking those questions until you get an answer. That will be far more valuable than God just giving you an answer.

What are you looking for? Will it prove to beneficial if you ever find it?

What do you want God to do for you? If you could ask God for anything with the assurance that He would give it you, what would you ask Him for? And what does that say about you?

Do you love Him? I didn’t ask, “Do you respect Jesus, or do you revere Him?” Do you love Him? And if you do, how will you show Him and the world that you love Him?