

Questions Jesus Asked, Part One

John 1:29-46

1. How we encounter Jesus.

- John 1:36, 43, 38, 20:16, 1:41

2. How you hear the question.

3. How you answer the question.

- Matthew 16:13-16

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In the Gospels, Jesus asks somewhere around 307 questions. There are also 183 times that people ask Jesus a question. But get this: out of those 183 questions he was asked, Jesus gave a direct answer only 8 times. Here's the point: Jesus clearly preferred to *ask* questions instead of giving direct answers.¹

Why would you think that is? Should we assume it was because Jesus did not know the answers? Nope, I think we all know that would be a wrong assumption. *Every* time Jesus taught, spoke, or did something, his message and methods were always on purpose.

Any interaction Jesus had with anyone in the Gospels is an interaction he can and will have with *each of us* – that's how the Bible works and it's part of what the Bible means when it says that God's Word is alive. So it's safe to accept then that *every question Jesus asks in the Gospels is a question he is asking of us as well*, and we need to find the answers.²

If you don't learn anything else from this series, at least know this: **never read Scripture as a *spectator*; always read Scripture as a *participant*. We are part of the narrative.** (That's tweetable!)

Every reason, motive, and point of any question Jesus asked is important because he's asking *us*. Understanding what Jesus is really asking is essential if we are going to be able to answer his questions honestly and fully and see our lives transformed. Our answers to Jesus' questions will determine the depth of our relationship with Jesus, and will determine the success of our Christian life, the fruit of our Christian life, and the impact of our Christian life. We must answer Jesus' questions well if we are going to accomplish a life of purpose in this world that God has for us.

So, we'll start this series with a question Jesus asked in John chapter one. I'd like to ask you to honor God's Word by standing as I read it to you today:

John (the Baptist) saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I myself did not know him, but the one who

¹ Dale and Sandy Larsen, *Questions Jesus Asks* (Intervarsity Press, Downer's Grove, IL) 2019

² Bible Study Series: Best Questions in the Bible <https://jesusplusnothing.com/series/post/JesusQuestions>

sent me to baptize with water told me, “The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One.”

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, 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 do you want?*”

They said, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?” “Come,” he replied, “and you will see.” So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which, when translated, is Peter).

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, “Follow me.”

Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, “We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked. “Come and see,” said Philip. (John 1:29-46, niv)

This, my friends, is the Word of God for the people of God – thanks be to God! Thanks for standing; you can be seated.

Obviously we’ve just read much more than the question in the center of that passage; we’ve read the context of the question Jesus asked, too, because if we are going to truly understand each of the questions we are going to explore together this summer, it is crucial that we do so within the context of the question; if we only look at the question itself, outside of its context, we run the risk of misunderstanding what Jesus is asking of us, and we will miss the meaning, or possibly add meaning that isn’t intended to be there. If we read the question alone, we fail to become participants in the story. Does that make sense? Don’t forget this other vital principle: whenever it comes to studying Scripture, context is *everything*, my friends.

So the question that we are looking at today is the one Jesus asks in the middle of that passage: “***What do you want?***”

When John wrote his Gospel account, he recorded this question as the very first words that Jesus spoke. Of course, we know these are not Jesus’ first words ever, but John chose *these* words on purpose. And interestingly enough, the very first

words of Jesus in the Gospel of John is a question. So that means that, in John's telling of Jesus' life, it was important for the readers' *first* encounter with Jesus to be *these* words and *this* question. That's because this question sets the stage for who Jesus is, what he will do for us, and how he wants to work in our lives. This is a very, very important question that means far more than what appears on the surface, and that's why we've also chosen it as the first in our series.

So before we get to the question, it's important to see understand that...

1. How we ***encounter*** Jesus.

In the context of this passage we see this because not only does Jesus lead by asking questions, he also does so through *relational lines*. He's not giving a pop quiz to strangers he knows nothing about. He asks this question in the context of relationship. Every one of *us* on this campus or on our online campus – every one of us that knows Jesus – we were introduced to him in some way, and the same is true for these first disciples of Jesus.

Each of the people in this narrative encountered Jesus through...

a variety of connections.

The first two men (Andrew and a disciple who's not identified) forged a link with Jesus through their master and mentor, John, who announced to them, "Look, the Lamb of God!" (1:36), and that prompted them to do more to find out who this Jesus really was. Normally we'd say it's not polite to point at people, but that's exactly what John the Baptist's job was: to point at Jesus – or, better yet to point *to* Jesus, and that's what prompted at least two of his disciples to begin following Jesus. It was their *mentor* who led them to Jesus.

Simon Peter was drawn into relationship with Jesus by his brother Andrew, showing how influential *family* bonds are. When it comes to Philip, we don't really know the way that he was introduced to Jesus. The original language of verse 43 doesn't tell us clearly whether it was Andrew who first approached Philip or if it was Jesus himself who did so. In any event, Philip went and found Nathaniel, demonstrating the influence of *friendship* bonds. In every case (Philip's case may be an exception), the Good News about Jesus spread through *preexisting relationships of trust*. I think it's important to see that Simon Peter, who would emerge as the leader among the Twelve, owed his first contact with Jesus to another man – his own brother, Andrew. When you and I introduce others to Jesus, it is important; those relational introductions change not only the lives of others, but then *they* join us in helping change the world!

Second, these characters encountered Jesus in...

a variety of experiences,

and those experiences reveal different dimensions of the individual's relationship with Jesus. The two disciples of John showed up as cautious seekers, open to Jesus

because of John the Baptist’s testimony (“Look, the Lamb of God!”), but they still weren’t ready to announce themselves as full-on disciples of Jesus.

Notice that they addressed Jesus as **Rabbi** (1:38), which was a title of enormous respect (see 20:16), but it also showed that they still had some reservations. Jesus intuitively knew that about them, but that didn’t matter to Jesus. He was open and accepting of their genuine questioning, and he gave them the gift of patient attention – just like he does with us when we honestly seek him. If we are honestly seeking Jesus, he has all kinds of patience with us. Whatever unrecorded, private conversations these people had with Jesus, we see them emerge as seekers who “have found” (1:41).³

So, that’s some of the context of this question. But in addition, we also to realize...

2. How you *hear* the question

...is important, too, because how you hear it says a lot about *you*. I did a sort of social experiment a week and a half ago. I posted this picture meme on Instagram and Facebook:

I even prefaced it with the statement, “Read it carefully. Make sure you don’t let your mind go where it tells you to go...” Have you read it carefully? How many first thought that this meme is a statement about vaccinations? How many of you realized, or maybe you realize *now*, that what it really says is *vacations*? See the difference? I got several initial responses from people saying things like, “No way!” or something about me encouraging a police state or communism. But once people saw what it really said, I had people say, “Please! Force me to take a vacation!”

My point with that little experiment was this: how you initially read the question says a lot more about *you* than it says about me. It says that you are probably preconditioned to your own biases, or you have made judgements about me and my motives, and that has clouded your ability to see what the statement really says. Someone else posted a response saying I was taking a pretty big risk of having people get upset with me or unfriend me because of what they *think* it says. But I’ll tell you, it’s no different than what I’ve faced as a pastor; I preach on something, and people’s biases or judgements about me lead them to think I said something I *never* said. For instance, several years ago I preached a sermon on racism. As soon as I finished, I had a guy tell me I should stop using the term “white power.” I told him I never used that term. He kept insisting and said, “Yes you did – you said it five times.” That’s the wonderful thing about preaching from a manuscript and recording our messages; I could prove it. But he was sure I said what he heard. His biases about the issue of racism and the way he judged me had him convinced I said something that I never said; it revealed more about him than me.

People need to wake up.
When the time comes, I
100% support
mandatory vacations
for everyone.
If anyone refuses they
should be FORCED.

³ Joseph Dongell, *John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1997), 48–49.

Well the same thing is true about how you hear this question that Jesus asks when he says, "What do you want?"

For example, if you think that in this question, Jesus is asking you to tell him whatever you wish for, as if Jesus was some kind of divine slot machine, then that says a lot about your mindset. (That's *not* what he's asking you, by the way – we'll see what he's asking in a bit). Or maybe you think Jesus is asking you this question in some sort of way that shows he's disappointed in you (with a hand on his hip saying, "Now what do you want?" as if you are bothering him), then *that* says a lot about your mindset.

Along the same line, how ever you hear this question reveals a great deal about what you think about Jesus – your answer will reveal if you are making judgements about his character that are inaccurate. Does that make sense? So take a moment and give some serious thought to what you *think* Jesus is asking...we'll take a look at it in a bit, but for now – what do you think he is asking you – and now ask yourself what *you think* might be saying about *you*, and what it says about what you think of Jesus.

But also realize...

3. How you ***answer*** the question

...also says a lot about you as well. Obviously, how you hear Jesus' question will determine how you answer it. If you are hearing it incorrectly, your *answer* will be off the mark too. But more than that, even if you hear the question correctly, your answer might still reveal some things about yourself.

Let me give you an example from another question Jesus asked; think about Jesus' question in Matthew 16:13-16, when he asked the disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" (It's a question we will look deeper into in another sermon). Their response is, "Some say John the Baptist, some say Jeremiah, or Elijah, or one of the prophets..." People *heard* the question correctly, but they *answered* incorrectly. Their answers revealed their lack of understanding and their lack of faith. They didn't understand enough to know the right answer, and their lack of faith left their answer short of what was really the truth. So it will be important to examine *your* answer to Jesus' question. If you don't fully understand the question or how to answer, don't hesitate to talk to your small group leader about it, or ask one of the pastors or teachers. Examine yourself to make sure you are answering in the full faith of what God can accomplish in your life.

So now it's time to figure out...

4. What is Jesus ***asking***?

I think most of us have figured out that Jesus is *not* asking, "What do you wish for?", nor is he asking, "What do you want me to do for you?" When Jesus asks, "What do you want?" He isn't asking, "What do you desire?" He is asking a question that is on a much broader, wider scope. Are you ready? According to the context and the

original language, Jesus is asking, “What is it that you seek in this life?” In other words, Jesus wanted to know what their most significant priority in life was; or what they *wanted* it to be.

A few years ago, an article was written by Kathy Caprino, a women’s success coach, writer, speaker, and leadership trainer. She surveyed hundreds of people probing a number of critical life and career questions. She compiled the answers, and said, “What’s so intriguing to me is that it’s becoming more and more obvious that the things we humans desperately long for today are not only universal and timeless, but also have become even more elusive and impossible to sustain, even as we “evolve” and develop in this tech-frenzied, time-crushing world.”⁴ The key question this survey probed was this: “If you could say in one word what you want more of in life, what would that be?”⁵ From that, she compiled “The Top 10 Things People Want In Life But Can’t Seem To Get” With each one, she lists the thing people want, and the challenge they face to getting it:

- #1: *Happiness*. The biggest challenge they say they have to gaining happiness is, “Not knowing what I want to do.” In other words, they feel that if they knew what they wanted to do for a career, they’d be happy.
- #2: *Money*. No surprise here; as if money would make someone happy. The biggest challenge, they say: “Not having enough money or time to accomplish the things I want to do.”
- #3: *Freedom*. The biggest challenge: “Having the freedom to find my ‘true purpose’ or being lit up by the day-to-day at work.
- #4: *Peace*. Biggest challenge: “Lack of clarity about who I am and my purpose.”
- #5: *Joy*. Biggest challenge: “How to find the right role or position for me now that will bring joy in my work.”
- #6: *Balance*. Biggest challenge: “Balancing my need/desire for flexibility while making enough money and having the benefits I want.”
- #7: *Fulfillment*. Biggest challenge: “Utilizing my potential in the best possible way, for myself and for others.”
- #8: *Confidence*. Biggest challenge: “Feeling like I have something to offer now, rather than feeling constantly as if I’m not ready and need more training.”
- #9: *Stability*. Biggest challenge: “Figuring out what to do next, to keep me afloat and be a bridge to my later years and retirement.”
- #10: *Passion*. Biggest challenge: “Overcoming feelings of ineptitude and negativity because of career setbacks.”

⁴ https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-top-10-things-people-2_b_9564982

⁵ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kathycaprino/2016/05/24/the-top-8-things-people-desperately-desire-but-cant-seem-to-attain/?sh=51abf43c7086>

Isn't it interesting how most of those things people are looking for have to do with purpose in life, or have to do with what they are ultimately seeking in this life. I'm pretty sure the people who did that survey were at a different point in life than where I am. "What do you want?" is quite the question... it is blunt and to the point. It is an imperative. It is unavoidable. I don't know about you, but for me, what I've wanted has been different at different times in my life. Not too long ago I decided I wanted a smoking hot body, but then I realized the only way that was going to happen was at the crematory. (My wants have evolved over time and hopefully matured a bit. Meanwhile Jesus asked and is still asking, "What do you want?"

Jesus asked them an imperative question. It was an unavoidable question. He wanted to know what it was they wanted. And of all the random possibilities out there, the answer the disciples give is about as interesting as interesting gets.

The disciples didn't say, "Could we get a cup of coffee at Starbucks?" or "Do you have time to grab a bite so we can chat over lunch?"

They asked, "What is your address?" "Where are you staying?" Never in my entire life have I opened a conversation by asking for a person's address or asking where they lived or where they were staying. It was an interesting answer. Actually, I think it's a little weird.

"They replied, 'Teacher, where are you staying?'" (John 1:38)

When Jesus asks them, "What do you want?" They responded with a question of their own. They only want to know, "Rabbi, where are you staying?"

Again, this means more than, "what's your current address?" *They are really asking, "Teacher, what is it like to abide with you? Is there room for us in your life? Can we come live where you live? Will you teach us? Because, what we are looking for is something to devote our lives to. We are looking for someone who will teach us the things of God. If you are who John says you are, we want to spend every possible moment in your presence. Where are you living, so we can come and be with you?"*

Their answer says a lot about them. They don't answer directly by saying what they were seeking, but **they plainly say that they are not seeking something from Him, but Himself.**⁶ Then, Jesus does what today would be unthinkable. If two guys followed me up and down the aisles of Walmart and then when confronted asked me, "Where do you live?" I don't think I would say, "Come and see." But that is what Jesus did. I think it is very interesting that in our Christian culture we often speak of the need to invite Jesus into *our* lives, but in this story we see Jesus inviting these two men into *his* life. Jesus isn't sitting around waiting for us to invite him into our lives. Instead, Jesus invites us into *his* life.

What we see in this text and what we hear is Jesus inviting these two disciples to enter into a relationship with him.

⁶ John Peter Lange and Philip Schaff, [A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: John](#) (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 92.

At the very heart of our text today is a simple timeless conversation that goes like this:

- Jesus asks, “What do you want?”
- You answer, “Well Jesus, I think I would like to get to know you better.”
- Jesus invites you to come along, “Come and live in a loving, living and learning relationship with me.”⁷

What is your answer?

Prayer

⁷ A significant source: Monty Newton, *What Do You Want?* Jan 20, 2020 (<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/what-do-you-want-monty-newton-sermon-on-following-jesus-244760>)