

# WHAT DO YOU WANT?

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## Great Questions (Part 1)

Text: Mark 10:32-45

### I

Maybe I'm unusual, but there are things that I wonder about sometimes. Why, for example, is the word "phonetic" not *spelled* the way it *sounds*? Or, why are there flotation devices under cross-country airplane seats instead of *parachutes*? If 7-11 is open 24-hours a day, 365 days a year, then why are there *locks* on the doors? If nothing ever sticks to TEFLON, then how do they make TEFLON stick to the pan? And how come they put braille dots on the keypad of the *drive-up* ATM? Why do we drive on *parkways* and park on *driveways*? Why is it that when you transport something by car, it's called a *shipment*, but when you transport something by ship, it's called *cargo*? And here's a real doozy: You know that indestructible black box installed on airplanes; why can't they make the *whole plane* out of that stuff?

Life is full of questions, isn't it? See, there's another one! There are *stupid* questions, like the ones I've just posed. There are very *serious* questions, like "Why do the good die young." There are *perennial* questions, like: "Why can't Congress or the Cubs get their act together?" There are *good* questions, like: "Is it worth my time to be listening to this message?" But, alongside all of these other wonderings, there is a very special class of inquiries that one might call "*great questions*."

By "Great Questions," I don't mean the kind that get discussed at conferences of philosophers and scientists or bandied about in YouTube videos and internet spam. The questions I'm talking about aren't aimed at defining something crazy *out there*, but at determining something crucial *in here* – questions not asked *BY* us but *TO* us. I'm speaking of questions that are so penetratingly personal that we tend to fumble before answering. We fumble because we instinctively know that the question is a very important one. We fumble because we sense that the way we answer it can both *reveal* and *reshape* the nature of our life, if we let it. When I say "Great Questions," I'm speaking of the kind of question that Jesus of Nazareth frequently asked.

### II

Take the episode we read about in Mark chapter 10, for example. The Bible says in verse 32 that Jesus and his disciples "**were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way.**" It is the start of the journey we associate with the season Christians now call "Lent." Jesus knows that in order to give life to the world, he will need to lay his life down upon a cross to pay the price for human sin. And so, "**he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him,**" the Bible says. "**We are going up to Jerusalem,**" he said, "**and the Son of Man will**

**be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."**

Jesus is charting out the way of life. He is saying, in effect, "I know you all want to see the redemption of Israel for which you've all been waiting, but the path to that restoration isn't what you think it is. The great good you long for is going to require a great sacrifice you might not be ready for. That's why I'm preparing you." The Scriptures say that **"then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to [Jesus]. 'Teacher,' they said, 'we want you to do for us whatever we ask.'"** And it is then that Jesus asks the first of the Great Questions we're going to examine this Lenten season. **"What do you want me to do for you?" he asked."**

### III

Now, if you are a parent, a kid, or remember being a kid, this has to sound very familiar. I wish I had a dollar for every time one of my boys came to me and said: "Dad, I want you to do something for me, but you have to say 'YES' before I tell you what it is." Have you been in one of those conversations? There is something not just amusing but also achingly sad about these kinds of overtures, isn't there? What's the assumption underlying the petition? Why do we as kids or why do James and John make approaches like this? Why do we sometimes manipulate and cajole and coerce the people who seem to have the power to grant what we want? Why do we set up our parents or our spouses, our bosses, friends, or God himself, dancing around the subject of what we really want? You know the answer, don't you? It is because there are some things we want so very badly that we just don't know how we'll bear it if the answer is "NO."

"What do you want?" Jesus asks. But we're actually afraid to answer with the deepest truth because too often we have heard the answer, "No." "Dad, will you play with me?" "No, I'm working." "Mom, can I tell you what happened?" "Not right now, honey; maybe in a minute, as soon as I'm off the phone." "Will you come over and play with me?" "No, I'm playing with Johnny." "Will you go out with me?" "No, I don't like you in that way." "Can I be on the team or play that part?" "No, you're not good enough."

When we were very, very young, most of us were even clearer on what we wanted and we knew how to ask for it. "I'm wet. I'm hungry. I'm scared. I'm lonely. Please take me in your arms." "I'm confused. I don't know the answer. I need someone to show me. Please help me learn." "I have a treasure to share. I have made something good. I can make a difference. Please value me." "I'm happy. I discovered something wonderful. I delight in this. Please enjoy this with me." At the start of life's journey, you and I and every human being we meet knew what we wanted and the want list was profoundly simple and simply profound: I want to love and be loved. I want to

grow in grace and wisdom. I want to give a gift that matters. I want to sing a song of joy with others."

But we heard the answer "NO," a bit too often. We got the answers from people who themselves had heard the answer "NO" an awful lot. And so, we started to ask for different things or in different ways. We started to substitute for these deep, God-given desires a more superficial and apparently attainable set of wants. To paraphrase Tiger McLuen, the speaker at our recent Family Conference, we started asking for the "4P's" instead. "I want prettiness (or good looks). I want performance. I want popularity. I want possessions." These are the things that are constantly being peddled to us by our society as the answer to our longings. If we just get these P's we'll have peace, our world tells us.

There's nothing wrong, of course, with being good looking or being a fine performer. Popularity and possessions, too, are certainly not evils. But as the story of a better known "Tiger" reminds us, what shall it profit a man to gain all this, so treasured by this world, if he has lost his soul? Or as the Message Bible paraphrases the words of Jesus: **"What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you?"** (Luke 9:25).

#### IV

This is why when Jesus asks James and John: "What do you want?" it is truly a "Great Question." Jesus was giving them an invitation to reveal to Him and to themselves "the real self" – the deepest desires of their hearts. Maybe it was because they were on the outskirts of Jericho that James and John answered as they did. Jericho was the commercial hub of that region – the Chicago of Judea. It was a place where most people were living for the 4P's. And so, in answer to Christ's question, James and John say here's what we want, Jesus: **"Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in glory."** In other words, give us great seats when you come into power, Jesus. We'll look pretty good sitting next to you. We'll be regarded as terrific performers to have gained such a position. We'll be popular. We'll have all the possessions that go with a glorious kingdom.

And I see the face of Jesus falling. I see the heartbreak in his eyes. **"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said.** You don't truly want to bear the weight I will bear for the world of the 4P's. You will taste of its bitter cup and be washed in its flood soon enough. You don't need all these substitute assurances for which you sadly clamor. What you most deeply want is what I came to give back to you. Even if you have forgotten it, I know what you most deeply desire.

You want to know that whether you are good looking or popular in the gaze of anyone else, you are beloved. And you are. That's why I crossed eternity to find you. You want to possess the greatest riches possible. And you will, if you grow in my grace and

my truth. You want to feel that you bring a gift that matters. You do, so long as you put whatever you have in my service. But let me be clear about this, because it's every bit as important. Whether you ever publish a book, build a big church, win a gold medal, or perform in any other way, you already ARE the gift that matters. That's why I've chosen to go to the Cross for you. You matter this much. And I know something else about you, says Jesus. You don't want to sit at life's table by yourself. You want others who will shed a tear of sadness or sing a song of gladness with you, come what may. You can have that assurance. That's why I formed this family and gave all of you to one another.

In his marvelous book, *Holy Curiosity*, Winn Collier writes: "Uncovering our deepest desires is onerous work. Smothered, forgotten, or shamed into hiding, our true desires often lie fallow. They are buried under years of disappointment, disconnection, fear, and outright manipulation. Our culture, addicted to shallow or nihilistic passions detached from God, provides little help. We need a wise, fierce friend to probe past the façade and quarry into our hidden places. We need a strong hand to grab hold of our entombed, comatose heart, wake it up, and lead it back to God. [In short], we need Jesus."<sup>1</sup>

## V

Jesus already knows what we want. But He asks us the Great Question, so that we will rediscover it for ourselves and begin to let go of those false P's that are just substitutes for those deepest desires to which God has already said "YES." But I think Jesus has something else in mind too. I think he wants us to help each other remember.

When was the last time you asked that Great Question of someone else? I don't mean, what do you want for dinner or what do you want for Christmas or what do you want to see at the movies or to do this afternoon? I mean, what do you want, deep down? In your family, in your circle of friends, fellow church members, or workmates are people who may need help getting in touch with something long buried. So ask someone: When do you feel most loved and wish others would do more? And tell that person what you particularly cherish about him or her. Ask someone: In what area of your life would you like to grow more gracious or wise? Then tell them where you've seen grace or wisdom already blooming in them. Ask someone: What's one gift you have that you want to use more? And describe for them how they've been a gift in your life or others'. Ask somebody today: What been bringing you joy lately? Then celebrate that with him or her.

Even sadness or sentimentality can be a clue to a deeper want or calling. Frederick Buechner says that: "Whenever you find tears in your eyes, it is well to pay the closest attention. They are not only telling you something about the secret of who you are, but more often than not God is speaking to you through them of the mystery of where

you have come from and is summoning you to where, if your soul is to be saved, you should go next."<sup>2</sup>

Even if it's painful, ask yourself and the people you care about: What do you wish your family or marriage could be like? What do you want your kids to know about your values or vision of life? What do you want your friends to be saying when they stand around your graveside one day? What do you want to do this week, to take a step in the direction of that future?

As Winn Collier points out, the tragedy of James and John's answer to Jesus' question is not that they made a selfishly brash request. The sad part is that their wishes were so small. In the passage that follows, a blind man boldly asks Jesus for nothing less than the gift of sight and Jesus grants it. Yet here are James and John, "jockeying for seating arrangements" when Jesus was offering them "God in the flesh and the scandalous mercy of a kingdom come." Let's not miss the moment, shall we? What, says Jesus, do YOU want? What do you hunger and thirst for? What do you want to see change or happen? Sit with that question. Let it roll around within you till there rises up from deep within a heartfelt answer. And you may well find that the answer of God is "YES."

Let's pray together...

# WHAT DO YOU WANT?

## Great Questions (Part 1)

Text: Mark 10:32-45

*"What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you?"  
(Luke 9:25 MSG)*

*"The entire life of a good Christian is in fact an exercise of holy desire."  
(Augustine, 5th Century North African Bishop)*

1. What do you want? Are any of the following "deep desires" to you?
  - To love and be loved
  - To grow in grace and wisdom
  - To give a gift that matters
  - To sing a song of joy with others
2. What of "the real you" do you sense you may have lost along life's journey? What caused or contributed to the loss?
3. Which of the following "substitute desires" have become powerful you substituted for your deepest desires? What other substitutes may be on your list?
  - To be pretty (good looking)
  - To be a great performer
  - To be popular
  - To be a possessor of things
4. Which of the following assurances of Jesus is particularly meaningful or encouraging to you at this stage of your journey? Which do you wish you could take in more deeply?
  - You are my beloved, in whom I am well pleased
  - You can grow in grace and wisdom and I will help you
  - You are the gift that matters and you have gifts that matter to Me and the work of my kingdom
  - Your final joy is my desire

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<sup>1</sup> Winn Collier, *Holy Curiosity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), p.145.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Whistling in the Dark* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), p.117.