

JESUS—THE MASTER QUESTIONER

Presented by

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As everyone knows who is hearing me present this sermon, over the past couple of years or so the Mill Creek congregation has become somewhat “famous”—or perhaps I should say “**infamous**”—for one thing: **tests in all of its Bible classes!** And as everyone hearing me present this sermon also knows, one particular teacher here at Mill Creek—who, for the purpose of this lesson, shall remain anonymous—is responsible for causing this epidemic of “testitis” to spread to other teachers in the congregation. As things stand right now, there is **no class** at Mill Creek a person can attend where the Bible-class teachers **aren’t** giving pop quizzes, major tests, or final examinations (and sometimes **all three!**). It seems that everywhere we poor students turn we are being peppered with questions, **questions**, and *more questions*. [And the sad thing about it is that our teachers appear to have gotten us so accustomed to taking tests that we’ve almost stopped complaining about having to take them!]

But speaking of “questions,” there is one particular question that, it seems to me, literally **begs** to be asked: **Why** are our teachers giving us **all these tests** with **all these questions**? As much as we may hate to admit it, you and I both know the answer, don’t we? Our teachers are asking us questions in an attempt to teach us important material from the Bible—and to help us remember what we have studied. Whenever we answer a test question properly, the material to which that question refers is reinforced in our minds. And whenever we miss a question and are forced to dig out the right answer, that process, too, reinforces the correct material in our minds. Either way we end up learning **more of God’s Word**—all because we were asked questions, **questions**, and *more questions*.

Now, that said, here is something that may **really** surprise you. Did you know that the “anonymous teacher” here at Mill Creek who began teaching us God’s Word by asking us all those questions did not come up with that teaching method all on his own? Truth be told, he actually got the idea for such a learning process from someone who is discussed in God’s Word at great length—**God’s Son, Jesus Christ**. Let me explain.

In the last sermon I presented here at Mill Creek, titled “The *Urgency* of Teaching—And the *Importance* of Learning,” I talked about Christ as a teacher. Here is what I said:

“While it is true that we today look upon Jesus as a prophet, preacher, and miracle worker, ***He was foremost a teacher***. Throughout the highways and byways of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea, Jesus taught in synagogues, boats, temples, streets, marketplaces, and gardens. He taught on plains, trails, and mountainsides—wherever people could be found and would take the time to listen. And His teaching had a profound impact.”

While Jesus used a wide variety of teaching methods during His earthly ministry—such as earthly stories with heavenly meanings (which we know as “parables”), references to historical events from His lis-

teners' past, or true stories like the one about the rich man and Lazarus—one of the Lord's favorite methods of teaching was to ask heart-penetrating, thought-provoking questions to those with whom He was speaking. Let me provide you with several well-known examples to prove my point.

Jesus frequently had intense discussions with a hyper-legalistic sect of the Jews known as the Pharisees—whom He once described as being “hypocrites who are like whitewashed tombs that appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness” (Matthew 23:27). On one occasion when the Pharisees were angry with Christ because of His teachings and because of the miracles He was working that proved He was the Son of God as He claimed, they screamed at Him, “By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?!” (Matthew 21:23).

Jesus responded by saying, “I will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things.” Then—in an effort to teach the Pharisees the truth and get them to see the error of their ways—the Lord asked them one simple question: “Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?” Matthew 21:25-27 records how the surprised Pharisees reacted to Jesus' straightforward inquiry.

“They argued with one another and said, ‘If we say, “From heaven,” He will say to us, “Why then did you not believe him?” But if we say, “Of human origin,” we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet.’ So they answered Jesus, ‘**We do not know.**’”

Jesus then said to the Pharisees, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.” Jesus had asked the Pharisees a very simple question that, if they had possessed honest hearts, would have been easy for them to answer. All they had to say was, “John's baptism was approved by God and sent from heaven.” But if they had given Christ the correct answer, they would have ended up condemning themselves since they had refused to do what John himself had commanded them to do: “Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance” (Matthew 3:8). By posing a single question, Jesus taught the Pharisees, their misguided followers, and everyone else who heard the discussion, how important it was to have an open mind and an honest heart—and how imperative it was to obey **God's Word** instead of putting stock in the Pharisees' incorrect legalistic **opinions about God's Word**.

Now consider a second example of Jesus' use of a question to get across an important spiritual point. In Matthew 19 we find the story about the man to whom we frequently refer as “the rich, young ruler.” While Jesus was teaching in Judea on one occasion, this wealthy fellow approached Him and asked, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” Before Jesus answered the man's question, He posed a question in return: “Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, Who is God” (Matthew 19:16-17). What was Christ's point? Was He denying that He was “good”—in the sense that, as Deity, He was part of the Godhead? Of course not! In fact, by His question Christ was making exactly the opposite point. If we examine the Lord's statements, here is what we see: “No one is good **but God**. You are call-

ing **Me** good. Thus, you are calling Me '**God**'” Via Jesus' question, He was trying to get the young man to realize to Whom he actually was speaking—the **Son of God**! Such is the power of a well-placed question.

Speaking of Christ's deity, here is a third fascinating example of Christ's use of a question. In Luke 6 Jesus was speaking to, as verse 17 informs us, “a multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon.” Verses 17-19 go on to tell us **why** these individuals were in Jesus' presence when they state that the people had “come to hear Him and be healed of their diseases, as well as those who were tormented with unclean spirits. And they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for power went out from Him and healed them all.” By the miracles Christ performed in their midst, He proved to them that He was **exactly Who He said He was—God's Son**. Having done that, He then asked those same people, “Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ but do not do the things that I say?” **Ouch!** Jesus wanted those people to know that there was more to having a relationship with Him than just being healed of physical diseases. In fact, to get across His point about having a **proper** relationship with Him, the Lord offered them the following illustration:

“Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock. But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great” (Luke 6:47-49).

After hearing Christ's question (“Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ but do not do the things that I say?”) and the explanatory story that followed, the people in His audience could more easily understand just how important a rock-solid faith in Christ was to their lives—**both here and in the hereafter**. Again, such is the power of a well-asked question.

A fourth example of Christ's shrewd use of questions is found in John 8:45-47, where He was teaching the same spiritual principle—that is, the importance of having a rock-solid faith in Him based on His position as the sinless Son of God. Jesus said, “I tell the truth, but you do not believe Me. **Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you *not* believe Me?**” Jesus had performed countless miracles in the presence of such people. He had cured their lepers, healed their lame, caused their blind to see, **and even raised their dead!** These people should have been as impressed—and should have reached the same conclusion—as the blind man Christ healed who is mentioned one chapter later in John 9. When the Pharisees questioned the man about the miracle Jesus had performed to restore his sight, the grateful fellow correctly observed, “Since the world began it has been unheard of that anyone opened the eyes of one who was born blind! **If this Man was not from God, He could do nothing**” (verses 32-33). And that was exactly the point Jesus was making when He asked, “**If I tell you the truth, why do you**

not believe Me?” Jesus’ miracles **proved** that He was indeed “telling the truth.” And that is why—based on the questions He asked those who had witnessed His miracles—He then said, “He who is **of God** hears God’s words; therefore **you do not hear, because you are not of God**” (John 8:47). The rhetorical answer to Christ’s questions on that occasion was that the people to whom He spoke were “not of God.” Nor did they have any plans to be “of God.” How sad. But do not miss the point that it was Christ’s pointed questions that showed them their pathetic spiritual condition.

A fifth example of Jesus’ judicious use of questions is found in His “Sermon on the Mount” where He said,

“Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye” (Matthew 7:3-5).

Christ’s admonition to the people to whom He spoke on that occasion was that instead of tending to **everyone else’s business**, they first needed to tend to their **own deplorable spiritual condition**. They were so busy trying to find the “speck” in their neighbors’ eyes that they had completely failed to realize that they had a “log” in their own eyes. And how did Christ categorize such people? He straightforwardly referred to them as **hypocrites**—which is why He went on to say, “As you want men to do unto you, you also do unto them.... Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. Judge not that you be not judged” (Luke 6:31,36-37). Enough said.

A sixth example of Christ’s astute use of questions is found in John 8:43-44 where He asked the Pharisees, “Why do you not understand My speech?” He then answered His own question when He said, “**It is because you cannot accept My word!**” Christ did not say that the Pharisees **could not understand** what He said. Rather, He said instead that they **refused to accept** what He said! But **why** was that the case? Jesus answered that question, too, when He went on to say to those same people on that occasion, “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.” Again—**Ouch!** What more stinging rebuke could Jesus have uttered to the legalistic Pharisees (who were so proud of saying, “**We are children of Abraham!**”) than to say to them, “No, **you are of your father the devil**”? The only thing the Pharisees could come up with to say in response to Christ’s blistering assessment of their evil actions was, “You are a Samaritan, and You have a demon!” (John 8:48). How pitiful an attempt that was on their part to skirt the truth of the accusation that Jesus had leveled against them—that instead of being “of God,” they were “of the devil!”

While there are numerous other examples within the New Testament of Christ’s using questions to make key spiritual points or to teach pressing spiritual lessons, perhaps none of the questions that the Lord posed ever had quite as much penetrating power into the human psyche as the two He asked in Matthew 16:26—“**What profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will**

a man give in exchange for his soul?” Do those questions really need any further commentary? As the Lord Himself put it, if a man loses his soul he will “go away into everlasting punishment” (Matthew 25:46) where he will endure forever “the judgment of hell” (Matthew 23:33). Earthly possessions will mean nothing on the Day of Judgment, at which time “the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10). Then, the only possession a person will have left will be **his or her soul**. And it will be then that God says one of two things to that person: (1) “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practiced lawlessness!” (Matthew 7:23); or (2) “Well done, good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your lord” (Matthew 25:23). How hard is it to understand Jesus’ point? Each of us has a decision to make. And there are only two possible choices: Either we **obey Christ** and enjoy eternal life in heaven; or we **disobey Christ**—and spend eternity in hell. Surely this is a no-brainer, wouldn’t you say?

I believe it is evident from the material I have presented to you today that Jesus was not just—as I said in my last sermon—a **master teacher**, but that He also was a **master questioner**! Unfortunately, many of the people of His generation either missed the significant spiritual points behind His well-chosen questions—or purposely chose to ignore them. Either way, they did so to the eternal peril of their immortal souls. And so, since this entire sermon has been about “questions,” I want to end with one last question that I hope you will seriously consider: “In what state is **your** soul today—saved, or lost?” It may be possible that someone who knows you very well could answer that question correctly on your behalf. But the fact remains that **you** are the only one who actually **can do something about it**! And that is why I plead with you today: If you are lost, and you **know** you are lost, **do something about it**—before it is everlastingly too late.