

## The Most Important Question

Matthew 16:13-20

August 23, 2020

Have you watched or listen to little kids asking questions? Starting around age three, the children begin to ask questions. When they do, they have lots and lots of questions. Why does it rain? Why does it snow? Why is the sky blue? Why is it windy? Where does wind come from? Why is the sea water salty? How much salt is in the ocean? Where do babies come from? How are babies made? Why do people die? Where do they go when they die? Why do I have to go to school? Why do I have to do chores and homework? Why do I have to eat vegetables? They have all kinds of questions.

They ask because they are curious. That's how they learn. They learn about the world by observing, testing, and asking. It is not just children who learn by asking; we all do. We also learn by asking questions. That is how we gather information. So, if we can learn to ask good questions or timely questions, it can lead us to great answers.

Isidor Isaac Rabi was a Nobel Prize winner in Physics, and one of the developers of the atomic bomb. Someone once asked him how he became a scientist. Rabi said, "Every day after school, my mother asked me about the school but she wasn't interested in what I had learned that day in school. She always asked, 'Did you ask a good question today?' She wanted to know if I had asked a good question. Asking good questions made me a scientist."<sup>1</sup>

Asking good questions is probably one of the most important skills we need to have in life.

I am sure you are familiar with the Corning Ware Company? They make cookware such as Pyrex and Corelle dishware. They make dishware with a material called, pyroceram, which is a glass-ceramic material, which can withstand heat up to 840 degrees Fahrenheit. It is very strong and doesn't break in high heat.

There is an interesting story about how they started the Corelle line of dishware in the 70's. One day, the president of the Corning Ware Company asked the head of the research department saying, "Glass breaks; why don't you do something about that?" This simple question led the entire research department to one single task; to prevent glass from breaking. The result was Corning Ware's

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<sup>1</sup> Brett Blair, from his sermon, "The Two Most Important Questions", [www.esermons.com](http://www.esermons.com)

Corelle line of dishware.<sup>2</sup> Just for the Corelle line of dishware, the company earns more than 500 million dollars each year. One question can change the way we think, the way we do things, and the things that we value.

Such was the question Jesus asked his disciples in Caesarea Philippi. Jesus asked them, “What do people say that I am?” “What do they say about me?” He asked about the public opinion of him, or how the disciples understood the public view of Jesus. They answered, “Some say, you are John the Baptist. Someone who preaches a penetrating message. Someone who even the royals are afraid of. But then, some say, you are Elijah, the one who is supposed to come before the Messiah. Others say you are Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Whatever they say, they all agree that you are definitely God-sent.” That is what they reported. Of course, I am paraphrasing what they said but that is the essence of their response.

Then Jesus asked a very personal question, the question they had to answer on their own. They could not borrow the answer from anyone else, because it was a personal question. The question was, “What about you? Who do YOU say that I am?” “Who am I to you?”

That is the question that really matters, isn't it? You cannot control what other people think of Jesus but you can decide what you believe about Jesus. And that is what really matters to you. So, how would you answer it? Who is Jesus to you?

Consider a few things. I am sure you can say more than what I am going share with you but I hope you consider the following.

First, Jesus Christ is our moral, ethical, spiritual guide.

The world is chaotic because it does not have the same reference point on what is right and what is wrong. Each person seems to rely upon his or her own ethical and moral standard. Many years ago, the late Billy Graham shared about a newspaper article written by Albert Steinberg. It was about the importance of having the same reference point in a society.

This article tells about the State Department of Highways of Pennsylvania building a bridge. The workers were building the bridge from both sides. When the workers reached the middle of the waterway, instead meeting each other, they found themselves thirteen feet apart from each other. What was the problem?

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<sup>2</sup> King Duncan, from his sermon “The Question That Will Change Your Life”, [www.esermons.com](http://www.esermons.com).

Each of the teams on both sides had used its own reference point. I am not sure how that happened. I am sure they tried to communicate with each other, and they probably thought they were on the same page. Apparently, they were not.

When people have different reference point to determine what is right and what is wrong, you have chaos in the society.

In the same article, Steinberg tells about a Geodetic of the center of the United States, which is located on Meades Ranch in Kansas. The exact location is the thirty-ninth (39th) parallel or latitude and the ninety-eighth (98th) meridian or longitude. The government uses this reference point for everything, whether they build a bridge or launch a missile. Ever since they have been using this reference point, there has not been a mistake, not even one inch. The article concluded by saying, "Location by approximation can be costly and dangerous."<sup>3</sup>

So often, our society uses the reference of approximation for our moral decisions. That is why there is so much chaos in our society today. Everyone is using their own reference point. What we need is a universal reference point so that we can say, "This is how the good, moral, ethical, and spiritual life looks like." We need a universal standard for everyone.

For Christians there is such a reference point; that is Jesus Christ. His principles, his truth, his sacrifice, his love, his holiness, and his challenge must be our reference point. Jesus not only revealed God's character in his life, but he also modeled the ideal life for humanity.

Second, Jesus is our redeemer. He is the way to restore our lives.

In John Bunyan's well-known work, *Pilgrim's Progress*, a Christian has been making his way to the Celestial City with a huge load tied to his back. This weight is so heavy that he is exhausted. This burden is his own sins. He carries that burden until he comes to the foot of the cross of Jesus. Then immediately, as Bunyan puts it, "His burden was tossed off from his shoulders, fell off his back, and began to tumble down. It tumbled and tumbled until it came to the mouth of the sepulcher. It fell in, was seen no more."

That is a wonderful way of describing what Christ has done on the cross. He took away our sins. The cross of Calvary bridged the gap between God and humanity.

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<sup>3</sup> Billy Graham, *Hope For The Troubled Heart* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1991), p.55.

Third, Jesus is our resurrection. Jesus has not only risen from the dead, but he also brings our own resurrection.

Jesus Christ is the only one in human history who has conquered the power of death. Saint Paul writes, “Christ has been raised from the dead. The first fruit of those who have fallen asleep.”

Jesus himself said, “I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. Because I live, you also will live.”<sup>4</sup> Not only Christ is risen from the dead, but he also brings us our own resurrection. We need to live with that conviction. That conviction changes the way we live.

Father Basil Pennington, a Roman Catholic monk, tells of an encounter he once had with a Zen teacher. He was at a retreat which was led by this Zen teacher. As part of the retreat, each person met privately with the Zen teacher. Pennington says that at his meeting the Zen teacher sat there before him smiling from ear to ear and rocking gleefully back and forth. Finally the teacher said: “I like Christianity. But I would not like Christianity without the resurrection. I want to see your resurrection!”

Pennington notes that, “With his directness, the teacher was saying what everyone else implicitly says to Christians: You are a Christian. You are risen with Christ. (Or at least you claim to be.) Show me (what this means for you in your life) and I will believe.” “Show me how your faith in your own resurrection affects the way you live.”

The world, the non-believers, are constantly observing you and me to see the evidence of resurrection. They want to see how our faith in our own resurrection affects the way we think, behave and live. Based on the way we live, the people will know if our claim of Christ’s resurrection is true or not. Does his resurrection affect how we live?<sup>5</sup> Of course it does. May our thoughts and actions reveal the evidence of Christ’s resurrection each and every day!

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<sup>4</sup> John 14:19 NIV.

<sup>5</sup> An illustration under the subject of “Resurrection”, from [www.esermons.com](http://www.esermons.com).